

Foundational Reflections for

WYD Seoul 2027

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Foreword

**Young people are the future of the world;
they are the hope of the Church.**

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

At the World Youth Day (WYD) in Lisbon in 2023, Pope Francis announced that Seoul would be the host of WYD in 2027. This is a special grace given to the Church in Korea, as well as a precious mission entrusted to all of us. The Lord has called the Korean Church to be a Church that lives synodality with young people.

World Youth Day is not just an event, but a pilgrimage of faith where young people come together to encounter Christ and discover new hope in Him. Through WYD, young people experience God's love anew and are sent forth as apostles of evangelization. It is also an opportunity for the Church to renew its community by walking alongside young people.

The Church in Korea was founded on the faith and martyrdom of the laity. Following the example of our ancestors, we must walk the path of synodality with young people in the Holy Spirit. WYD Seoul 2027 is an important opportunity to go beyond preparing for an event to rejuvenating and renewing our Church.

To this end, we must listen to the concerns and aspirations of young

people and cultivate hope with them. Most importantly, we must all have a personal encounter with Christ and live a life united with the Lord through prayer and the Eucharist. Then the Holy Spirit will renew the Church through us.

Brothers and sisters, WYD Seoul 2027 is not a one-time event, but a pilgrimage of hope to which everyone is invited. I ask that all parishes, communities, and believers respond with joy and walk together on this road.

Let us earnestly pray that the Blessed Virgin Mary guide our journey and lead us all to her Son.

Archbishop of Seoul

President of the WYD Seoul 2027 Local Organizing Committee

Archbishop Peter Soon-taick Chung

정순택

“

The reason why the youth of the world must gather in one place
is that they possess the power to change the future.
You possess the power to build a new world
by establishing your lives within God's love and grace
and loving your neighbors, thereby transforming the world.

– Archbishop Peter Soon-taick Chung, Archbishop of Seoul,
during the WYD Seoul 2027 Kick-Off Mass

Understanding World Youth Day

■ What is World Youth Day?

World Youth Day, or WYD¹⁾, is a special time when the Catholic Church officially commemorates the youth of the entire world. Initially established by St. John Paul II in 1986, WYD was commemorated annually on Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, until 2021. Since then, it has been commemorated on the Solemnity of Christ the King.

When he began World Youth Day, St. John Paul II asked that individual dioceses conduct small-scale events or programs²⁾ for the youth and, to this end, wrote a “Message to the Youth of the World”³⁾ every year. In addition, the international version of WYD is held around every three years. The Holy Father invites young people from around the world to a certain place⁴⁾, where bishops, priests, religious, young people, and various international organizations and institutions of the Catholic Church come together to celebrate the Christian faith. At WYD, young people from around the world, united by their Christian faith, reflect on the teachings of Jesus Christ as shared by the

Pope and bishops and come together to affirm and share their faith. They are also invited into a cultural and spiritual celebration that offers space for open dialogue and reflection on fundamental questions about the human person.

■ **History of WYD**

1) Starting Out

WYD was the vision of St. John Paul II for youth ministry. From the beginning of his pontificate, the Pope told young people, “You are my hope. You are the future of the world; you are the hope of the Church.”

On March 13, 1983, he opened the Saint Lorenzo International Youth Centre in Rome. On March 25 of the same year, he proclaimed the “Holy Year of the Redemption” in remembrance of the 1950th anniversary of the death and resurrection of the Savior and received a wooden cross from the youth of the Saint Lorenzo International Youth Centre to commemorate this special year.

Then, at the closing ceremony of the Holy Year of the Redemption (Palm Sunday, April 15, 1984, in Rome), the Pope asked the youth to gather and witnessed the passion and energy of the numerous young people gathered in Saint Peter’s Square. The Holy Father realized that the turnout of so many young people in one place professing the Catholic

faith could be an important catalyst for awakening the youthfulness of the Church and inviting more people to the Church. At the conclusion of the Holy Year, St. John Paul II asked the young people of the Saint Lorenzo International Youth Centre, representing the youth of the world, to carry the Cross throughout the world as a testament to their faith and a symbol of salvation. After this, the “Holy Year” Cross was carried by the young people to various countries, including diverse locations such as Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Luxembourg, Ireland, Scotland, Malta, the United States, the Netherlands, South Korea, Poland, Switzerland, and Australia, eventually becoming a symbol of World Youth Day.

Emphasizing the crucial role of the youth in fulfilling the mission of evangelization in the modern world, the Holy Father issued the apostolic letter *Dilecti Amici* (“To the Youth of the World”) in 1985, commemorating the International Youth Year set by the UN. He then declared that Palm Sunday each year would be observed as World Youth Day. In 1986, the following year, the first official WYD was held in Rome on March 23, Palm Sunday, with local Churches also participating at the diocesan level. This marked the beginning of World Youth Day, a journey that continues to this day.

2) Previous Hosts and Themes



▲ Figure 1. Previous hosts of WYD

• 1986, Rome, Italy Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you. 1 Peter 3:15	• 2005, Cologne, Germany We have come to worship Him. Matthew 2:2
• 1987, Buenos Aires, Argentina We ourselves have known and put our faith in God's love towards ourselves. 1 John 4:16	• 2008, Sydney, Australia You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses. Acts 1:8
• 1989, Santiago de Compostela, Spain I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. John 14:6	• 2011, Madrid, Spain Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith. Colossians 2:7
• 1991, Czestochowa, Poland You have received a spirit of sonship. Romans 8:15	• 2013, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil Go and make disciples of all nations! Matthew 28:19
• 1993, Denver, USA I came that they might have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10	• 2016, Krakow, Poland Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Matthew 5:7
• 1995, Manila, Philippines As the Father sent me, so am I sending you. John 20:21	• 2019, Panama City, Panama I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word. Luke 1:38
• 1997, Paris, France Teacher, where are you staying? Come and see. John 1:38-39	• 2023, Lisbon, Portugal Mary arose and went with haste. Luke 1:39
• 2000, Rome, Italy The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. John 1:14	• 2027, Seoul, South Korea Take courage! I have overcome the world. John 16:33
• 2002, Toronto, Canada You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world. Matthew 5:13-14	

▲ Figure 2. Table of previous WYD hosts and the themes

■ Components of WYD



1) Pilgrimage of the WYD Symbols

After the Pope announces the next city that will host WYD at the closing Mass of the previous WYD, the WYD Cross and Icon are handed over to the next host diocese. The host diocese participates in a ceremony to receive these symbols during the first year of the three-year preparation period for WYD. The WYD Cross and Icon then journey through other countries and all the dioceses of the host country before WYD begins.

2) Days in the Dioceses

Before WYD, other dioceses in the host country or the relevant Bishops' Conference host the Days in the Dioceses (DID), a preliminary event lasting four nights and five days. DID consists of unique programs prepared by the dioceses and local youth ministry organizations, combining an experience of the local Church's faith, culture, history, and natural heritage with an experience of the communion of the Church. Homestays are typically arranged in private homes and local parishes during this time.

3) World Youth Day

World Youth Day, which typically lasts 6 days, can be broadly divided into three parts. One part is composed of the main events, including the opening Mass celebrated by the Ordinary of the host diocese and all the events where the Holy Father is present, such as the welcoming ceremony, the Way of the Cross, the Vigil, and the closing Mass. The second part is the Catechesis Triduum, where bishops from various countries provide direct catechesis to young people. Finally, WYD has both the Vocations Center, which offers opportunities for young people to learn how respond to God's call, and the Youth Festival, in which the young people directly participate. During WYD there are also places for confession and Eucharistic adoration for all the young participants.

4) Follow-up Gatherings

Young people have opportunities to process their experiences and the significance of WYD through various follow-up activities such as pilgrimages, Masses, catechesis, etc.

■ Significance of WYD

Why does the Church declare World Youth Day as a special celebration, gathering youth from around the world in one specific place to commemorate it with such importance? Some may argue that WYD is a

single-time, massive event that requires enormous resources and is only accessible to those with financial means and free time. They contend that it would be better to use those funds to support impoverished youth and also suggest that for modern young people, who are often skeptical of faith and religion, a pilgrimage of faith may seem old and outdated. Such skeptical perspectives have been encountered by every city that has hosted WYD. However, despite low expectations, the cities and local churches that have hosted WYD have directly witnessed the enthusiastic response of young people to St. John Paul II's message: "[The Church] entrusts you with an exalting apostolic task: to be the protagonists of the new evangelization."

The Church in the United States was able to cultivate a group of experts to lead the development of Catholic youth ministry in the country by hosting WYD. The Church in the Philippines, with a long-term vision to revitalize ministry through the entire process of preparing for, hosting, and following up on WYD, was able to develop a master plan to activate youth ministry throughout the nation. Churches in Europe, which had been facing an aging population due to the exodus of the young generation, found hope for renewal of the Church through WYD. On a smaller level, parishes that were unsure how to welcome young people trained their older members and were able to convey the message that the Church, even with its long-standing traditions and heritage, does not reject young people but rather is open to encounters with them. In this way, the Holy Spirit has made it possible that World Youth Day

bears fruit even beyond those that blossom during the days of the festival where young people from around the world gather to share their joy.

On April 22, 2021, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life emphasized in its “Pastoral Guideline for the Celebration of World Youth Day in the Particular Churches” that individual Churches, through the annual celebration of World Youth Day, “need to ensure that the younger generations feel that they are at the centre of the Church’s attention and pastoral concern.” WYD is an important opportunity to show young people, who may distance themselves from religion but feel a deep thirst for spirituality and faith, that the Church awaits them and listens to their pain and hopes. Through WYD, young people will come to experience that they are each worthy of welcome and love, in their own unique way, through the shared exchange of faith and culture. Additionally, through various encounters and dialogue at WYD with one another, they will have the opportunity to reflect on how to think, understand, and respond as Christians to pressing global issues such as climate change, war, poverty, and the pursuit of peace.

Participation in WYD is not limited to a certain religion or age.⁵⁾ As such, this festival is not only an event for the Catholic Church but a festival for all young people and a gathering for all those who treasure youthfulness. Both the participants of WYD and all those who witness this festival of joy will encounter the living Christ through the young people and feel the fervent passion of the young generation who will renew the Church and the world.

The Korean Church and Synodality

■ Invited to Live the Spirit of Synodality

On August 6, 2023, Pope Francis announced Seoul, South Korea as the host city of WYD 2027 during the closing Mass of WYD Lisbon 2023. With this announcement, the Korean Church has been called to prepare for World Youth Day, where young people from around the world will experience Christ with the Holy Father, who is the principal organizer of WYD. This is a special invitation from the Pope to the Korean Church to become a Church that lives the spirit of synodality with the youth.

WYD Seoul 2027 is following in the steps of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (hereinafter, the Synod on Synodality). In 2021, Pope Francis extended an unprecedented invitation to the entire People of God to take part in this synod—departing from the traditional model in which only a select group of delegate bishops participated. He also announced its theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.”

As the theme suggests, a synodal Church, or synodality, was the central theme of the synod. The term “synod”⁶⁾ refers to the journeying

together of the People of God. Since the early Church it has also been used to denote an important assembly where the community deliberates and discusses significant issues, making decisions through discernment. The spirit of synodality has continued to this day through the Synod of Bishops, established at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council.⁷⁾

The Synod on Synodality described synodality as the “specific modus vivendi et operandi of the Church, the People of God”⁸⁾ which “refers to the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church,”⁹⁾ all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the modus vivendi (way of life) and modus operandi (way of acting) of the Church, encompassing not only the act of communal discernment regarding the overall life of the Church but also its practical dimensions. In this sense, the synodal Church that Pope Francis envisioned is a Church where the entire People of God journey together in faith, heeding the activity of the Holy Spirit present within them. In other words, it is a Church that fellowships together and fulfills the mission entrusted to her by God in unity. Pope Francis invited the Korean Church to live out this spirit of synodality through WYD Seoul 2027.

In response to this invitation, the Church in Korea is actively seeking to deepen its experience of synodality and to embody the practice of conversation in the Spirit. As part of this effort, the formation process for the youth preparing for WYD Seoul 2027 is being carried out through conversation in the Spirit.¹⁰⁾ This involved reading and reflecting on the apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit* and the Korean Catholic

Youth Ministry Guidelines and sharing the insights gained through the process.¹¹⁾ The formation included participation from various members of the People of God, including laypeople, religious, and clergy, as well as individuals of diverse ages (from 20 to 60) with youthful hearts oriented toward God. They listened and conversed with one another, prayed and discerned together, and journeyed toward a shared mission. Through this practice, they were able to deepen their awareness of the Lord's love, achieve communion with each other in God, and contemplate the mission the Lord has entrusted to each of them.

■ Inheriting the Spirit of the Early Korean Church: Synodality

The invitation to live in synodality within the Church is not limited to a selected few. God invites all the People of God, all the laypeople, religious, and clergy, to participate in this journey altogether. We all enjoy equal dignity as children of God through baptism.¹²⁾ As such, the members of God's kingdom are not in a hierarchical relationship but are companions with equal dignity. All the People of God are the protagonists of the Church; indeed, they truly are the Church. The Korean Church is a powerful example of this truth. In Korea, laypeople voluntarily embraced the faith without missionary assistance and nurtured the seeds of the Gospel.

The Church in Korea began with young people in the Joseon dynasty. Aspiring to build a new world, they discovered the Christian faith in their search for truth and formed a Church community by encountering the living Christ through baptism. They strived to continue their life of faith even amidst harsh persecutions. Without clergy, laypeople protected and grew the Church with their martyrdom, while at the same time persistently requesting priests from the Bishop of Beijing and the universal Church. In a time marked by a rigid class system, people from all walks of life, regardless of age or gender, willingly sacrificed their lives to protect the Church as equal children of God.

This reality reminds us of the true nature of the synodal Church as we journey toward the third millennium. It is not a Church led by those with special positions, but a Church where all the children of God walk together, embodying the essence of synodality. Therefore, inheriting the spirit of our ancestors in faith, we must live the spirit of synodality by fostering communion and jointly fulfilling our communal mission in cooperation with all the People of God and in accordance with the will of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

■ **Listening to the Voice of God**

To live out the spirit of synodality and prepare for WYD Seoul 2027, we are called to listen to one another's voices. This is because

synodality is “to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us” (Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops). The listening and dialogue that take place in this process must be especially open to the voices of those who hold different perspectives—those whom we might easily overlook or exclude.¹³⁾

We must especially listen to the voices of young people in our preparation for WYD Seoul 2027. The Synod on Synodality helped the Korean Church reflect on its past shortcomings in being a true companion to adolescents and young adults. While the importance of young people within the Church was acknowledged, it was confessed that young people had not been fully engaged, and that efforts to make them feel included and experience the Church’s accompaniment had been insufficient.¹⁴⁾ Therefore, we must be open to the voices of young people. We must listen to what God is saying through them. We must move beyond our entrenched prejudices and stereotypes and live our journey together.

The young are people who open and pave the way to Christ. The People of God must walk alongside young people as they fulfill their unique roles given them by God. On this path, we must be present with one another, listen to and learn from each other, and discern and act upon what God is saying through one another. Through this, each of us will come to experience our unique God-given talents and manifest the glory of God in our own lives.

Understanding Korean Youth Ministry

As stated in the previous chapter, the Korean Church, through the Synod on Synodality, reflected recently that it has not been a true companion to young people. However, this is only one aspect of the overall reflection. To understand the reality of youth ministry in Korea, it is necessary to go into further detail. Therefore, this chapter will explore the journey of youth ministry in the Korean Church from the time the faith was first introduced to the Korean Peninsula to today, as we are preparing for WYD Seoul 2027. We will examine the current reality and challenges and further consider the direction and principles necessary for the future.

■ **Development of Catholic Youth Ministry in Korea¹⁵⁾**

Since 1784, when a 28-year-old young man, Yi Seung-hun, was baptized in China and returned to Korea to share the Catholic faith—initiating gatherings of believers in Myeongnyebang (present-day Myeongdong Cathedral)—the Korean Church has remained steadfast in its interest in faith

formation of young people throughout its 240-year history.

In the early days, university students served as catechism teachers, primarily in the Sunday schools of each parish, offering religious instruction to adolescents. At the same time, youth ministry was actively carried out through Catholic student movements such as Cell groups and the Legion of Mary. Later, at the Pastoral Council held in 1984 commemorating the bicentennial of the Korean Catholic Church, “youth (student) ministry” was explicitly defined for the first time. Within this context, youth ministry in Korea has developed with a core focus on nurturing young people not merely as recipients of education, but as active apostles of social evangelization—entrusting them with the lay vocation to proclaim and live out the Gospel in the world. Accordingly, the foundation of youth ministry within the Korean Catholic Church broadened through various initiatives: weekend retreats like CHOICE led by the Maryknoll Foreign Mission Society, spiritual prayer gatherings, faith formation programs such as the Catholic Youth Bible Group, and praise ministries exemplified by choir groups like the Naksan Choir of the Catholic University of Korea and the Gatdeung Choir of Suwon Catholic University.

However, the growth of youth ministry gradually decreased amidst the rapid changes of modern society. Consequently, parishes began seeking to diversify their pastoral activities by organizing around interest-based clubs, moving beyond the traditional frameworks of catechesis and devotional groups in order to better engage young

people. However, these efforts alone were not enough to prevent the fundamental phenomenon of the weakening of youth communities within the Church. Furthermore, in response to socio-cultural challenges—including demographic shifts caused by low birth rates and an aging population, the wave of the Fourth Industrial Revolution driven by the emergence of AI, and the global pandemic—the Korean Church recognized the need to reorganize its pastoral structures more flexibly, with dioceses and religious institutes taking the lead. In response to these challenges, each diocese and individual religious institute undertook more systematic and specialized research on youth ministry, striving to develop pastoral approaches that resonate with the changing trends. Through these efforts, the Korean Church is moving beyond traditional pastoral approaches and is now actively exploring intergenerational solidarity¹⁶⁾ that embraces all age groups, fostering diverse exchanges of faith and culture with the universal Church, strengthening family-centered pastoral capacities, expanding its outreach through social media, and establishing youth-centered hub parishes as focal points of ministry. These initiatives reflect ongoing efforts to address the emerging issues in youth ministry and shaping a vision for the future.

■ Challenges of Youth Ministry in Korea Today

Despite the Korean Church's dedicated efforts to revitalize the faith

life of the younger generation, youth ministry still faces numerous unresolved challenges. For example, statistics show a continued decline in the number of young believers, reduced participation in the sacraments, a growing rate of religious inactivity, and decreasing levels of certainty in their faith, pride in the Church, and satisfaction with religious life. These illustrate the crisis currently facing youth ministry in the Korean Catholic Church.¹⁷⁾ The main cause can be attributed to an attitude of spiritual secularism, characterized by a lack of practical application and discussions that remain purely theoretical.¹⁸⁾ This gives rise to four major issues, which seem to be worsening.

First, there is the issue of values: how to understand the relationship between faith and secular values, and how to effectively instill the value of salvation in young people.

Second, there is the issue of personnel: the declining passion among priests, religious, and pastoral workers who act as intermediaries in proclaiming the Gospel to young people, along with a fading awareness of the need for ongoing education and formation.

Third, there is the issue of pastoral systems and programs: challenges arising from the lack of new paradigms for traditional Sunday schools that have remained unchanged for decades; unengaging, rote-based catechesis; and insufficiency of teaching materials and programs.

Fourth, there is the issue of the pastoral environment: despite facing numerous challenges—such as inadequate pastoral infrastructure, a lack of hospitality within Church institutions, declining numbers

of volunteers, social uncertainty, increasing secularization and relativistic subjectivism, and the rise of an online society—there has been a lack of concrete alternatives and policies. Too often, these issues have been met with mere exchanges of information and expressions of empathy, without substantial action.¹⁹⁾

These issues have been pointed out for a long time. However, it was the COVID-19 pandemic that served as a critical turning point—bringing the severity of these issues into sharp focus and prompting a more active search for concrete solutions. Even before the pandemic, these issues were frequently raised, but there was a noticeable reluctance to face them head-on. Instead of pursuing concrete solutions, theoretical discussions often prevailed over practical problem-solving. However, during the pandemic, as people were unable to attend church in person and most organizational activities for ministry came to a halt, the repercussions were felt within the Church in a variety of tangible ways. For instance, contrary to the optimistic expectation that all religious activities would naturally resume after the pandemic, many adolescents and young adults who had drifted away during that period lost their spiritual habits and have not returned to the faith community. As a result, the number of Sunday School students has declined, prompting many parishes to merge elementary and middle/high school programs. Additionally, numerous parish youth groups have either been dissolved or are functioning with only a minimal number of members. As such, the challenges facing youth ministry have become an

immediate reality requiring urgent response—not a future concern to be merely anticipated—directly affecting pastoral leaders, volunteers, and young people alike.

■ Principles and Direction of Youth Ministry in Korea

Thus far, we have briefly explored the history, present realities, and pressing challenges of youth ministry in Korea. Of course, each diocese, religious institute, and community may possess distinct characteristics and face different circumstances. That is why the Committee for Youth Ministry of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea conducted qualitative and quantitative research through symposiums, public hearings, and nationwide surveys with clergy and laypersons to present the principles of youth ministry in the Korean Church.²⁰⁾ This process gave birth to the Korean Catholic Youth Ministry Guidelines, which outlines the direction of youth ministry in Korea.²¹⁾ Notably, the principles of youth ministry outlined in the guidelines align closely with the spirit of the synodal Church envisioned by Pope Francis, where all the People of God journey together in faith, attentively listening to the activity of the Holy Spirit among them, as highlighted in the previous chapter. Through this process, we can identify the following common themes concerning the principles and direction of youth ministry.

First, youth ministry is described as an accompanying journey that

nurtures young people to trust their own abilities²²⁾ and encourages them to aspire to and take on a more active role in youth ministry activities.²³⁾ “This journey corresponds to an accompanying journey of synodality that fosters communion, participation, and vocation (evangelization). Through a personal encounter with God, young people deepen their understanding of themselves, their vocations, and the visions received from the Lord, develop their professional careers and lives, and share the hope of experiencing true happiness within Him.”²⁴⁾

Second, while emphasizing the initiative and active participation of young people, the importance of personal accompaniment provided by the faith community throughout this journey is underscored.²⁵⁾ Accordingly, it embraces the concept of accompaniment as building “personal relationships characterized by mutual dignity and equality”²⁶⁾ where young people and all members of the Church, including pastoral leaders, respect one another, discern their vocations, and strive to live them out within both the Church and society.

Third, the Church emphasizes the importance of providing spaces where such a ministry can take place, which can be categorized into two types.²⁷⁾ The first is physical space. This refers to open spaces of communion that are not detached or completely separated from everyday life but are places where young people can come at any time to rest, meet friends, and pray.²⁸⁾ The other space is one that cannot be seen. This refers to pastoral programs that help foster “experiences of unconditional love and free, peaceful, and trusting

personal relationships, rather than imposed knowledge or external coercion, such as traditional catechesis lessons.”²⁹⁾

Building on this, the future of youth ministry in the Korean Church, grounded in the spirit of synodality, aims to empower young people to see themselves as active protagonists in ministry and to embody the role of companions through the love and mercy of Jesus Christ—as shown in the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12–13; Luke 24:13–35). Finally, it seeks to guide the entire People of God in journeying together on their unique faith paths by discerning the work of the Holy Spirit within the whole Church community.

The principles and direction of youth ministry presented by the Korean Church align with the vision of St. John Paul II, who instituted World Youth Day to nurture young people as the hope of the Church and protagonists of evangelization. His intent was not to treat them as a separate group, but to integrate them as companions journeying in faith with the entire Church. The fact that these principles are presented based on the spirit of synodality, which pays greater attention to the activity of the Holy Spirit, is especially significant. Just as the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit³⁰⁾ and, led by the Spirit, magnified the Lord with all her soul,³¹⁾ it is our hope that the future of youth ministry—and World Youth Day as a part of that journey—will bear abundant fruit under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

4

Meaning of WYD Seoul 2027

WYD Seoul 2027 is a festival of encounter, a mission to make known God's love for the Church and for humanity, a pilgrimage of hope, and a journey toward a young and vibrant Church. When Pope Francis announced the choice of Seoul for WYD 2027, he said, "This is a marvelous sign of the Church's universality and of the dream of unity to which you bear witness!"³²⁾ World Youth Day is a global celebration of the universal character of the Catholic Church. With WYD Seoul 2027, we will pave a path of unity, hope, courage, and passion that welcomes not only Catholics, but also people of diverse identities from around the world to walk together.

■ A Festival of Encounter

WYD Seoul 2027 is a festival of encounter. It is a place where young people encounter one another, the Church community, the Pope—and above all, God—in joy. The encounter between young people and all the members of the Church is in line with the Catholic value of universality

and expresses the spirit of the synod, a path of walking together.

When young people encounter one another, they experience miracles.³³⁾ When young people pursue the common good and build social communion together, “[they] can have the magnificent experience of setting [their] differences aside and working together for something greater.”³⁴⁾ The Final Document of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops describes young people, along with their peers, as being “promoters of a citizenship that includes diversity and socially responsible religious commitment for building up social ties and bonds of peace.”³⁵⁾ When young people meet on the journey to WYD, they are brought closer to the common good of the kingdom of God.

WYD Seoul 2027 and the preparation of it will also be an important opportunity for young people and the Church to reconnect. The Church in Korea has experienced a crisis in youth ministry ever since the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁶⁾ WYD Seoul 2027 is both a place to listen to the voices of young people and a journey of accompanying them in their daily lives so they can see the Church as meaningful to them.³⁷⁾ As such, the preparation for WYD Seoul 2027 will be an important place of encounter and an experience that can revitalize the stagnant youth ministry in Korea.

In addition, the encounter between young people and the Holy Father is a special force that keeps WYD going. In WYD, young people have the opportunity to dialogue with the Pope, the head of the universal Church, about the world in which they will live. Through

this encounter, young people see that they have within them the desire “to be protagonists of change” and that through them “the future of the world begins”.³⁸⁾ They can also feel the presence of Jesus in their midst through their encounter with the Pope, the Vicar of Christ.

In all of these encounters at WYD, young people ultimately meet Jesus, the one who calls us friend.³⁹⁾ This encounter with Jesus, our friend, happens through prayer. Through prayer, “[g]radually Jesus makes us appreciate his grandeur and draw nearer to him.”⁴⁰⁾ As WYD is a time when young people meet the Lord, the journey to WYD must take place in prayer.

■ A Mission Field

South Korea is the first country to host WYD in a traditionally non-Christian culture, and the second Asian country to host WYD after the Philippines. The peaceful coexistence of various religions in South Korea is in line with God’s will “in this age, where it is important that we all open our hearts to people, to other people, and other religions.”⁴¹⁾ Since the young people who are the protagonists of WYD are open to communicating and dialoging with peoples of all faiths,⁴²⁾ the open hearts of young people in Seoul, South Korea, where various religions coexist, will allow for freer interfaith and intercultural dialogue and harmony.

The WYD journey in South Korea is also an opportunity to address the widespread distrust and disappointment in religion. Two-thirds of South Korea's young adult population is non-religious, and many of them report that the reason is because they are not interested in religion or are disappointed in religion.⁴³⁾ This is a result of the failure of religions, including Catholicism, to demonstrate the positive values of religion to non-religious people. Therefore, through the journey of WYD Seoul 2027, the Catholic Church in Korea can show how it listens to and embraces the voices of young people and the vulnerable, and how it shares a message of hope. In doing so, it may help transform the negative perceptions held by non-religious people and invite them to encounter the merciful love of God and the beauty of the Gospel.

South Korea is also connecting young people around the world through culture. It is no secret that the diverse culture of South Korea, led by K-pop, is gaining popularity around the world. During the pandemic, Korean music and culture comforted the world, and the idol fandom culture that spread through Korea has become a conduit for young people around the world to connect with each other across borders and races. With this cultural centerpiece, WYD in Korea will be a festive occasion for Catholics and other young people interested in Korea to visit Seoul and connect with each other.

In addition, WYD offers an opportunity to share the spirit of Korea's forefathers in faith with the world. The Catholic Church in Korea has

its foundation in the determined efforts of the laity and a history shaped by the noble witness of many martyred saints who defended the faith. In modern times, Catholics have also fought passionately to uphold the values of democracy, justice, and peace. WYD Seoul 2027 will be an important moment to share with the world the light of the Gospel—a light that was proclaimed and preserved without missionaries in a non-Christian cultural context—and to connect the passion of our saints and ancestors to the here and now.

■ **A Pilgrimage of Hope⁴⁴⁾**

WYD Seoul 2027 is significant in that it continues the spirit of Jubilee 2025. The Jubilee is celebrated between WYD Lisbon 2023 and WYD Seoul 2027, which means we celebrate it while preparing for the next WYD. In his 2025 bull proclaiming the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis emphasized that the role of the Catholic Church today is to read the signs of the times and discern the Lord’s will—namely, hope—amid the challenges of our age. He stated, “In addition to finding hope in God’s grace, we are also called to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us.” The late Holy Father also desired that the Jubilee and WYD “will help many of the young, including those who are not ordinarily churchgoers, to encounter Jesus, and to hear the Gospel’s message of hope.”⁴⁵⁾ We pray that the Jubilee and WYD become

occasions for an ongoing personal encounter with Jesus in the lives of young people.

This encounter is desperately needed in South Korea, which is famous for making remarkable progress towards modernization within a short amount of time, but also has its share of woes. The country's high suicide rate and low birth rate, in particular, show that young people find it difficult to find hope in their circumstances. As *Spes Non Confundit*, the bull of induction of the 2025 Jubilee, points out, “[w]ithout the hope that their dreams can come true, they will inevitably grow discouraged and listless.” Today's young people are living life more intensely than ever before, but an uncertain future, combined with despair and loneliness from too much competition and individualism, leaves them feeling depressed and clinging to fleeting pleasures. As “the hope of the Church,” today's young people need signs of hope.⁴⁶⁾

Therefore, the Catholic Church must be a companion that genuinely empathizes with the pain of young people, listens attentively, and invites them into a space where, through solidarity, they can heal one another in God. “[T]he Jubilee should inspire the Church to make greater efforts to reach out to them.”⁴⁷⁾ This is connected to the desire of St. John Paul II as well. He stated that he saw that people were lonely, and he wanted them to know that they were not alone.⁴⁸⁾ WYD Seoul 2027 will be a pilgrimage of hope, reminding young people that they are not alone—that other young people, adult believers, the Church, and God are all by

their side. It will pass on and preserve the spark of hope inflamed by the Jubilee.

■ **A Pastoral Journey Toward a Young Church**

One of the fruits of WYD is the renewal of the Catholic Church as a young Church.⁴⁹⁾ “[T]he Church is the real youth of the world. She possesses what constitutes the strength and the charm of youth, that is to say the ability to rejoice with what is beginning, to give oneself unreservedly, to renew one’s self and to set out again for new conquests.”⁵⁰⁾ WYD Seoul 2027 can therefore be seen as “the most dramatic moment” for the Church in Korea to return to God’s love.⁵¹⁾

First, WYD Seoul 2027 can bring a sense of fulfillment and revitalization to the Korean Church. In the 1980s the Church successfully organized three big events in Korea,⁵²⁾ and the explosive growth in the number of believers showed that the events were beneficial for spreading the Gospel. The 2014 Asian Youth Day and the Mass for the beatification of Paul Yun ji-Chung and 123 martyr companions also received positive reviews. We also saw through WYD Denver 1993 that the experience of “we did it together” among those involved in ministry contributed to the growth of the Catholic Church in the United States. The fruit of this sense of accomplishment will inspire positive renewal within the Catholic Church and bring it youthful vitality.

Second, WYD Seoul 2027 is an opportunity to build a system for rejuvenating and renewing the Church. WYD Manila 1995 was prepared with a long-term view to revitalize pastoral care by carefully considering the journey before, during, and after the event. In the process, the Filipino faithful consistently prayed for the spiritual growth of young people through WYD and supported volunteers in becoming true pastoral companions. As Pope Francis said, WYD is a call to “above all, [...] continue accompanying youth ministry in ‘ordinary times’.”⁵³⁾ Through organized preparation, our Church can successfully host WYD Seoul 2027 and lay the foundation for sustaining a young Church.

Third, WYD Seoul 2027 will allow the Church in Korea to realize intergenerational cooperation. WYD Paris 1997 helped the Church in France renew its interest in young people through the hospitality of the older generation through homestays and Days in the Diocese, as well as identify the common challenge of the communalization of young people. Through the journey of WYD Seoul 2027, the Korean Church will also come to experience the message that the Church and the older generation are not excluding young people but are open to encountering and walking with them.



▲ Figure 4. Significance of WYD Seoul 2027

Through WYD, young people experience the living Christ through prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist, community gatherings, service to the poor, and the testimony of the lives of the saints. “Young people who have had this experience become convincing witnesses of the message of the Gospel.”⁵⁴⁾ These individual experiences come together to aid the Church in recovering her youthfulness. That is what WYD Seoul 2027 means.

Theological and Pastoral Reflections on the Theme of WYD Seoul 2027

Take courage! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

■ Missionary Connection Between the Theme and WYD

The WYD Seoul 2027 theme, “Take courage! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33), is more than a comforting message. It is the final sentence of Jesus Christ’s farewell discourse to His disciples before His Passion and death—a solemn, testament-like declaration entrusted to them in His final moments. At the heart of the Gospel, these words form an evangelical summons to proclaim true peace through communion with God, even in the midst of suffering and trials. For young people of today, it is a message of mission.

The entire verse of John 16:33 says, “I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have overcome the world.” This declaration of Jesus to His disciples before His death on the cross emphasizes the spiritual yet tangible peace that flows from union with God, grounding that peace in

the victory that Christ has already accomplished.

In the original Greek text, the verb “overcome” (*νεικηκα*) is in the perfect tense, signifying a victory that was accomplished in the past but remains effective in the present and will continue into the future. In other words, the victory of Jesus is not a one-time event but a living victory that exerts its power in the here and now, as well as into the future.⁵⁵

This victory is not just about overcoming physical suffering. It is a declaration of salvation from sin, death, and the power of evil. As such, this message functions as both profound consolation and a call to mission, inviting the disciples to lead lives fully engaged in the Lord’s victory and allowing them to remain steadfast even amid the persecution they will encounter in the world.

■ Victory Perfected in Love: The True Meaning of Overcoming the World

In the Gospel of John, “the world” (*κόσμος*) signifies both the creation that is beloved by God and the fallen order marked by sin, falsehood, violence, and death. When Jesus declares, “I have overcome the world,” He does not call His followers to ignore or avoid evil; rather, He solemnly proclaims that true victory consists in faithfully living out God’s love and truth amid the realities of the world.

This victory is not manifested through earthly power but through

love, forgiveness, and the road to the cross. Jesus stood with the suffering, engaged with sinners, and even forgave His enemies. His victory transcends evil and death through love, standing in fundamental contrast to the ways of the world.

“For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16) reveals that God’s love for the world is most fully expressed in the cross and resurrection. Therefore, overcoming the world does not entail rejecting it, but rather looking at it through the Lord’s eyes and transforming it in the light of divine love. As a community called to bear witness to this victory of love, the Church is called to live the Gospel with courage amidst the world and to serve as an instrument through which the love of God is made visible.

■ **The Witness of the Early Korean Church: A New Life in Christ**

This evangelical courage and peace were evident in the early Catholic community in Korea. The Korean Church began with laypeople, especially young intellectuals, who voluntarily embraced the Gospel even without ordained clergy. Notable figures such as Chong Yagyong and Yi Byeok, driven by a deep yearning for truth, accepted the Christian faith and recognized the equal dignity of all people before God despite the prevailing class-based society. These young intellectuals

formed practical faith communities grounded in these convictions.⁵⁶⁾

Undeterred by the hierarchical system they were in, they accepted the truth that all are equal before God and formed a community of love that would not yield to the world, even amid persecution. They also willingly sacrificed their connections to family and society, ultimately giving up their lives for the sake of the Gospel. This was not a confession of an idealistic belief but a testimony of a life spent putting the Gospel into practice through concrete actions.

Young people living today have the opportunity to hear God's call anew within this living legacy of faith. In responding to that call, they begin a new journey of faith—overcoming the “world” of this era. The example of the early Korean Church community is a living witness to the truth that the Gospel can be implemented in any circumstance.

■ Young People Today and the Church's Calling: As Fellow Travelers

Pope Francis lamented that many young people today cannot look to the horizon and are giving up on their dreams, weighed down by the burdens of life.⁵⁷⁾ Indeed, the reality young people face today is full of challenges. Amidst competition and uncertainty, broken relationships, and confusion caused by a loss of direction, many young people experience deep interior suffering.

WYD offers young people facing such realities a space to rise up again through words of encouragement. The Church must not be a pedagogue, but must embrace its responsibility to become a fellow traveler along the journey, one who listens attentively to young voices, discovers God's presence within their experiences and language, and walks alongside them as they rediscover the joy of the Gospel.⁵⁸⁾ That way, WYD will be a journey where young people from around the world come together to experience God's love, recognize that they are beloved members of the Church, and engrave Christ's peace and hope upon their hearts.

■ **Sent Forth from Courage and Victory: A Journey of Living Christ's Peace**

To achieve this journey, the Church must offer the true peace of Christ to young people burdened by the struggles of life today. The words of Jesus, "I have told you this so that you might have peace in me," are not merely words of comfort but an invitation to live boldly based on the already accomplished victory of salvation. The declaration, "I have overcome the world," calls us to a life of active courage—one that does not give in to fear nor retreat in the face of the trials and suffering of the world.

WYD is a place to respond tangibly to this invitation from Christ. Young people from diverse cultures and backgrounds gather, personally

encounter the living Christ, and have a profound experience of the peace given in Him. Through prayer, the Word, the Eucharist, and sharing with the community, young people experience an inner peace that transcends temporary emotions and remains unwavering even in suffering. This peace is a grace that instills the conviction that the Risen Lord is present among us, even now, and is working in each of our lives.

Ultimately, WYD is not simply an event or festival, but a launching point for young people to embrace Christ's victory and be sent forth as witnesses to that truth through their lives. It serves as a communal space for sharing and bearing witness to the victory of the Resurrection while also marking the beginning of a journey to rise anew in the Lord's peace and courageously live the Gospel.

■ Our Active Participation in the Lord's Victory

“Take courage! I have overcome the world.” This theme proclaims not only the victory of Jesus but also serves as a call to take up the vocation and mission entrusted to each of us. Through this message, the Church commissions young people to go forth into the world, inviting them to be authentic Christians who accompany the suffering, stand in solidarity with the oppressed, and actively embody God’s love.

WYD Seoul 2027 will be a grace-filled occasion to share with the universal Church the legacy of faith and courage of the early

Korean Church community, who endured suffering and bore witness to their faith by following the Gospel. This journey will lead to a life that consists of hope that transcends suffering, courage that conquers despair, and love that surpasses selfishness. Such a life truly overcomes the world. It is also the way to finding peace in Christ and proclaiming that peace to the world. WYD Seoul 2027 will serve as the start of a missionary journey of resurrection faith to be experienced by both the Korean and the universal Church.

Pastoral Goals and Operating Principles of WYD Seoul 2027

WYD Seoul 2027 is an important opportunity for the Korean Church to renew itself as a young Church. WYD is not a one-time event, but a pastoral journey that begins with its preparation, which should be used as an opportunity to revitalize youth ministry. The first step in that process is to renew parish youth ministry. We need to work together to help young people in each parish have faith experiences and grow in their faith. We also need to create an environment where young people in the Church can actively participate, walk with them on their faith journey, listen to their voices, and provide opportunities for them to grow as members of the community.

To start on the path to achieving this, the WYD Seoul 2027 LOC held meetings with the Preliminary Research Team from January to June 2024. As mentioned in Chapter 2, The Korean Church and Synodality, diverse members of the Preliminary Research Team were able to engage in conversation in the Spirit to discuss the goals and overarching principles for youth ministry in the Korean Church in relation to WYD Seoul 2027. This chapter outlines the key pastoral goals and operating

principles for WYD Seoul 2027 that were collectively presented, discussed, and proposed throughout the process.

■ Pastoral Goals of WYD Seoul 2027



1) Becoming One with Christ

WYD is an important space that invites young people to a personal encounter and heartfelt conversation with Christ. We encounter Jesus more deeply when we are together with others who share our faith. WYD becomes a place to share in unity, expressing a genuine confession of faith by becoming witnesses to one another's faith, sharing our own journey, and professing Christ who is with us. To this end, it is a precious opportunity for a personal encounter with the living Christ,

drawing each person into deeper union with him. Through this encounter, all will share in the profound faith experience of becoming one with Christ. In this way, everyone who takes part in WYD will come together as companions on a journey of faith, united in proclaiming with all their hearts that Christ is our only Savior and our everything.

2) Growing Closer to the Lord

God calls each of us to our own unique roles. To respond worthily to His voice, we must deepen our relationship with God and discern the leading of the Spirit. Therefore, the most important thing we can do to grow in our relationship with God is to prioritize time and opportunities to explore that relationship.⁵⁹⁾

WYD is an opportunity to enter into deeper communion with God through a variety of relationships and experiences. This greater intimacy with God leads us to discover our true selves, and the authentic relationships that flow from this self-knowledge become the foundation for building a healthy Church community. This strengthened relationship continues to deepen and grow after WYD, in different ways and different settings. It will ultimately become an unbreakable tie that helps us hold on to our relationship with God, even amid the many challenges we may face within the Church community.⁶⁰⁾

3) Walking Together, Guided by the Spirit

The Spirit, working through the Father and the Son, leads believers

to form deep relationships with one another and then leads the communities they form to seek the will of the Lord and live accordingly. Synodality is a reflection of this role of the Spirit. Guided by the Spirit, the synodal process helps the Church listen to the diverse voices within, respect each other's opinions, and rightly discern the will of the Lord as a community.

We should also consider that the gifts the Holy Spirit has given each of us are not just for our personal growth, but for the good of the Church. When the gifts of the Holy Spirit work together in harmony, the Church experiences greater unity and community. This process enables the Church to continuously change and grow, equipping it with the flexibility and creativity needed to respond to the challenges and demands of the times.

Therefore, WYD Seoul 2027 is an important opportunity to put synodality into practice, ensuring the People of God listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and discern what the Lord desires for WYD Seoul 2027. In this process, young people will become integral members of the Church, actively participating, exercising their gifts, and playing a leading role in shaping the future of the Church under the guidance of the Spirit.

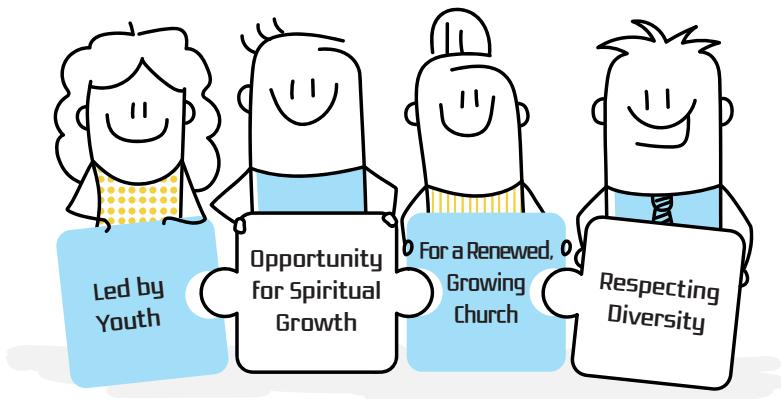
4) Listening and Communicating Together

In the synodal process, every voice matters. It is through mutual respect and listening that we are given the opportunity to allow our individual

gifts to contribute to the growth and development of the community. In light of this, we must listen to each other with humility. The synodal way of sharing, conversation in the Spirit, invites us to listen to the voices of others and to practice mutual listening and communication. As such, we must create opportunities for young people to participate in this practice, fostering a culture of active communication and sharing within our communities. In this way, we can build more inclusive and dynamic Church communities.

In the preparation and implementation of WYD, it is vital to actively listen to the voices of young people. To this end, it is necessary to create various venues and provide multiple opportunities for young people to express their voices in diverse ways. Pastoral leaders and companions of young people, along with the entire community of adults, should establish channels to listen to their voices and offer empathy, comfort, and encouragement. Throughout this process, the most crucial aspect is that listening to young people's voices goes beyond simply hearing their opinions and leads to real reflection and change. When listening leads to real, tangible change rather than being a mere show, young people will regain their trust in a Church that truly listens.

■ Operating Principles for WYD Seoul 2027



1) Led by Youth

① Listening to the voices of young people

We must create opportunities for young people to grow through WYD. The first and most fundamental step in engaging young people is to listen attentively to their voices.⁶¹⁾ To this end, pastoral leaders and adults in the Church must not view them merely as recipients of pastoral care or as workers to be mobilized. Rather, they must recognize young people as key protagonists in the evangelization of their generation and the wider world, and their concerns and proposals must be received with sincere and thoughtful attentiveness.⁶²⁾ An open and inclusive atmosphere must be fostered throughout the planning and execution of WYD, enabling young people to take initiative with

confidence and a sense of purpose. Their voices must be genuinely heard, and spaces of trust must be established to enable their active and meaningful participation.⁶³⁾

Through the accompaniment and support of adults⁶⁴⁾ in the Church—who assist young people in bringing their ideas and visions to fruition—young people will be inspired to offer the gift of their youth freely and generously in service to the community. In doing so, they will mature into authentic protagonists of evangelization.

② Young people as protagonists of the Church

Young people must recognize and actively engage in their role as protagonists during the preparation of WYD. They must come to realize that “the Church is me,” understanding their roles and responsibilities, and participate not merely as passive recipients but as active agents.

In the Korean Catholic Youth Ministry Guidelines, it states that “young people are and ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society.”⁶⁵⁾ This underscores the need for young people to take on an active role in both society and the Church, making an impact through their involvement. As such, young people must be nurtured to take on the responsibility of being active members of the Church, not merely following instructions but creating tangible change from whatever position they are in, based on their faith and passion.

③ Young people as missionaries who invite other young people

The Second Vatican Council emphasized that youth should be the first apostles to other youth, carrying on the apostolate within the context of their own social environment.⁶⁶⁾ Young people who have gone to WYD each have a unique experience, and their testimonies can serve as a powerful inspiration, encouraging other young people to participate. As a result, they will play a crucial role in inviting other young people who do not know about WYD to the event. Furthermore, adults who have participated in WYD in the past and now serve in the Church can welcome young people based on their own experiences, accompanying them as companions. Through their role as hosts, young people will come to feel a sense of belonging and importance as members of the Church community, and their experiences and testimonies will offer trust and inspiration to both their contemporaries and the next generation.

④ Trust and patience in the potential of young people

WYD Seoul 2027 must become a living pastoral ministry for young people, led and participated in by young people themselves. Therefore, during the preparation process, we must ensure that young people, the future and present of the Church, are at the heart of WYD. The Church must encourage their active involvement in the planning and execution of WYD, providing opportunities to develop programs and activities that reflect their aspirations and expectations. In this process, young

people will take on the role of protagonists, presenting creative and innovative ideas for the evangelization of the Church and the world. While there may be shortcomings and mistakes along the way, these must be viewed not as failures but as valuable moments for growth. The youth must be accompanied with patience and understanding, not with impatience or reproach. The active, communal participation of young people will transform WYD into a living youth ministry and will offer them a precious opportunity to experience that they are the Church.

2) Opportunity for Spiritual Growth

① Experiencing God's love through the proclamation of the kerygma

Experiencing God's love is at the heart of WYD. Young people are invited to encounter the greatness of his love in a deep and life-changing way through this pilgrimage. Pope Francis referred to the following as simple truths that must be proclaimed tirelessly and basic certainties:⁶⁷⁾

- God is love.
- Christ saves you.
- He lives.
- The Spirit gives life.
- Our Lady loves you because she is a mother

While WYD includes a missionary dimension, it must not be seen solely as a cultural or celebratory mission. It is essential that the core message of our faith—the kerygma—is boldly proclaimed with our witness.⁶⁸⁾ Through this proclamation, we come to know the incredible love of God, who gave his only Son to the world, and the love of Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for us. Recognizing this great love leads us to a personal encounter with God, who is Love. When young people experience this love of God during WYD, we must help them embrace it and live it out in their daily lives.⁶⁹⁾ Once a young person truly discovers the simple yet profound truth that God loves them, they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to become apostles, sharing this truth through their lives as they continue the journey of faith beyond WYD.

② Recognizing the importance of prayer

As we prepare for WYD, prayer is a vital source of wisdom and strength that sustains us spiritually. It is through prayer that we converse with God. In our communities, prayer should never be reduced to a duty. It must be an act of love, a way of lifting each other up in faith. Prayer, through deep communion with God, opens our hearts, enables mutual understanding, and empowers us to journey together toward our common goal. This is why we are called to rest and find consolation in God's embrace through prayer throughout the WYD pilgrimage, so that, strengthened by his grace, we may become a community united in faith and love.

Prayer is particularly vital for the spiritual growth of the volunteers

and the unity of the community. Through moments of prayer, the volunteers can renew their souls, encourage one another in God's love, and form a stronger community. This will play a crucial role in ensuring that WYD preparation becomes not just event preparation, but a true experience of faith, united in God.

As such, in all the preparations for WYD, we must prioritize prayer. This is the only way all volunteers and participants can experience God's grace and complete their preparations in true joy and peace.

③ Vocation, response, and mission

The process of recognizing the unique role the Lord has entrusted to each of us can itself bring about a profound transformation in our faith and in our lives. Through preparing for and taking part in WYD, many young people will not remain mere participants but will respond to the Lord's call and come to see their lives from a renewed perspective.

The spiritual experiences and graces received through WYD continue to bear fruit even after they return to their daily lives, guiding them to live as instruments of the Lord in the world. Ultimately, young people are led to fulfill God's will in their own communities and circumstances, and they come to a deeper awareness of their own value and role in doing so. WYD, therefore, becomes a meaningful starting point, a moment of discovery of the vocation and gifts God has entrusted to each of them. From this foundation, they begin a life rooted in faith, proclaiming Christ's love in the midst of the world.

3) For a Renewed, Growing Church

① A Church built by the entire People of God

To become a Church built by the entire People of God through WYD Seoul 2027, we must remain vigilant against clericalism—a concern raised in both Christus Vivit and the Korean Catholic Youth Ministry Guidelines.⁷⁰⁾ When clergy fail to shepherd their flock with respectful listening and pastoral love and instead make unilateral decisions without proper listening and dialogue, and the faithful are reduced to a passive role, it hinders the laity's active participation and silences their voice within the Church.

This is especially true in youth ministry. Clericalism that excludes dialogue and genuine listening can block young people from engaging as protagonists and keep them from recognizing their call to evangelization. Therefore, we must ensure that young people are meaningfully involved in every stage—from planning to decision-making—so that they are truly empowered as protagonists in evangelization.

At the same time, young people must be careful not to demand that their opinions be accepted without question or to shift all the blame onto others. Rather than reacting differently depending on whether their own opinions are reflected, each person must remember that together with others they are the Church. We are all called to offer our God-given gifts in service of the shared mission of WYD. Through mutual listening and respect, young people are invited to

embrace their roles and responsibilities with joy. In doing so, we draw one step closer to becoming a Church in which all of God's people journey together.

② WYD as a pilgrimage, not a one-time event

WYD must not be treated as a one-time event, but as a milestone along the longer journey of youth ministry in Korea. The entire preparation process for WYD Seoul 2027 should be viewed as a pilgrimage—an opportunity to deepen and mature in faith. This journey should not end in 2027, but should continue through ongoing interaction and communion so that young people remain engaged as members of the Church.

In particular, after WYD, it is essential to provide follow-up opportunities, such as programs and spaces for dialogue, so that young people can continue in solidarity with the Church. In this way, they will not be mere participants in a single event but will grow into key members of the Church who take on lasting roles and leadership.

③ Rediscovering the precious value of people and service

The Church must accompany young people in their roles as volunteers with great attentiveness, ensuring that they are neither wounded nor overburdened. Volunteering in the Church should not be reduced to the mere fulfillment of tasks, but should be viewed as a meaningful opportunity for young people to discover their vocation within the

Church and grow in faith. Above all, it is essential that we rediscover the true meaning of service. Forming young people through service does not merely involve assigning roles and responsibilities. Rather, it means creating an environment where they are respected as members of the Church and can serve based on their talents and passions. In this setting, young people will not remain as temporary volunteers. Rather, they will grow as companions of the Church, coming to a deeper understanding of their faith and discovering what truly matters in life.

④ **Organic solidarity throughout the Church**

Strong coordination between parishes, vicariates, dioceses, and the universal Church is vital. Inter-diocesan communication and collaboration, in particular, are crucial for effective preparation for WYD. Before the events of WYD begin, there are the Days in the Dioceses. The DID are a significant prelude where participants first experience the hospitality of the local Church. These gatherings require careful and thorough preparation, as they provide dioceses with the opportunity to witness the vibrancy of the global Church firsthand. Well-prepared dioceses will not only host youth from around the world but will also experience a renewal of their youth ministry.

For this, effective coordination between dioceses, as well as close connections and collaboration between dioceses and vicariates and between vicariates and parishes, is crucial. When the Church in Korea

comes together to welcome young people from around the world in an atmosphere of open communication and cooperation, it will be able to renew the youthfulness of the Church in the land.

⑤ Caring for our common home

In a culture marked by throwaway consumerism, preserving the ecosystems created by God is a responsibility shared by all. Today, the common home given to us by God is suffering. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reaffirms our shared responsibility, stating that “For human beings… to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins.”⁷¹⁾

Thus, every stage of WYD preparation must reflect our commitment to sustainability. Pope Francis called upon us to limit as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderate their consumption, and maximize their efficient use, reusing and recycling them.⁷²⁾ We must aim to generate minimal waste, make use of reusable items, and remain attentive to environmental care. This is not merely about protecting the environment, but about honoring the richness of creation and fulfilling the Church’s mission to promote a sustainable future. In doing so, young people will recognize their responsibility for our common home and become empowered, as people of faith, to

participate in the ongoing work of making the world a better place. In this way, WYD can become a powerful witness to the Church's teaching in mainstream society.

4) Respecting Diversity

① Respecting differences

At WYD, we are called to embrace “a youth ministry capable of being inclusive, with room for all kinds of young people, to show that we are a Church with open doors.”⁷³⁾ Every young person must be invited to participate fully in the Church community and experience being welcomed as a brother or sister in Christ. “No one should be excluded or exclude themselves.”⁷⁴⁾ All young people—whether they are middle or high school students, out-of-school youth, persons with disabilities, or youth of various ages from local dioceses, distant from the Church, or outside ecclesial structures—all should be able to participate in WYD without discrimination.

Young people attending WYD must also respect the lives and experiences of others from different backgrounds. WYD is an international gathering of people from around the world who differ in race, culture, age, gender, physical ability, and belief. We must remember that we are all equal in dignity before God and welcome one another with open hearts. When we open our hearts and share our faith with those who are different from us, we may encounter Christ in new and unexpected ways.

② Embracing all generations and ages

Though WYD stands for “World Youth Day,” it is not only for the youth. Participation in WYD is not limited to a certain religion or age. Rather, WYD should be seen as a space where generations respect each other’s experiences and wisdom and share a common passion for faith. Through intergenerational hospitality and mutual respect, WYD becomes a place where older generations can pass on the traditions of faith, and younger people can offer hope for the future. This mutual exchange allows us to overcome generational divides and walk together in true solidarity and cooperation.

③ Respecting diverse values

WYD is a joyful gathering where people from all walks of life, holding diverse values, come together in a spirit of unity. Therefore, even when participants differ in their views on politics, economics, society, culture, or even religion, we must respect one another’s beliefs. It is especially meaningful that WYD is being held in Korea, a country where many religions coexist. As people of diverse faith backgrounds come together and engage in respectful dialogue, they will learn how to live in peaceful coexistence and grow in appreciation for one another’s beliefs and values.

④ Breaking down barriers of disability

To truly welcome persons with disabilities into WYD, we must commit

to accommodations and inclusive planning. They should not merely join as participants—they should also be given opportunities to serve as volunteers. First and foremost, all facilities used for WYD must be fully accessible and barrier-free, ensuring that people with disabilities have the same right to movement and participation. Safety measures and facilities for WYD should be thoughtfully planned to ensure the comfort and protection of all participants—both with and without disabilities. In addition, all programs should be available in multiple languages and sign language and presented in clear and accessible language so that everyone, regardless of age or background, can understand and engage. Awareness education and clear guidelines are also crucial to foster an environment of mutual understanding and cooperation.

These efforts help eliminate obstacles caused by misunderstanding and create a space where all participants can respect and support one another.

5) In Conclusion

As we embark on the journey toward WYD Seoul 2027, we must walk always with the Holy Spirit who guides us, striving to discern the true purpose of the invitation of Pope Francis to gather young people from around the world in Seoul—and, more deeply, what God wishes to accomplish through this gathering. We are invited at this moment to entrust ourselves fully to the Lord, praying that His will, not our own plans, be fulfilled through us. When we humbly surrender

all to the Holy Spirit, we will begin to recognize the works God is accomplishing through WYD Seoul 2027. Through WYD Seoul 2027, may we work together to shine the light of hope to both young people and the world.



Concluding Remarks

In this document, we have explored the meaning of WYD and the pastoral response of the Catholic Church in Korea as we prepare for this global gathering. Drawing together the Holy Father's messages to the universal Church, the Korean Church's faithful response, and the voices of the laity, religious, and clergy united in the Preliminary Research Team, one guiding theme emerges clearly: synodality—the journey of the People of God walking together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As we prepare for WYD Seoul 2027, the Church in Korea must not be guided by any one generation, class, or group. Instead, all members of the Church are called to participate, listening attentively to one another and, above all, discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit, who accompanies us at every step of this journey. When we prepare for, celebrate, and carry forward the fruits of WYD Seoul 2027 in a spirit of synodality, we will bear true spiritual fruit—just as the Lord Jesus promised: “a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap.”⁷⁵⁾

As we move forward toward WYD Seoul 2027, we entrust our journey to the Blessed Virgin Mary. By the power of the Holy Spirit,

she conceived Jesus Christ and remained with Him throughout His hidden life, public ministry, passion, resurrection, and ascension. She was assumed into heaven and now stands beside the Triune God as the Mother of the Church her Son entrusted to her, interceding for all the faithful, presenting their prayers, and accompanying them on their journey of faith. Mary, our Mother and faithful Companion, firmly believed the words of the Archangel Gabriel: Nothing is impossible for God.⁷⁶⁾ Though she endured deep suffering—her soul pierced by sorrows⁷⁷⁾—she never lost hope, for she recognized the presence of the Holy Spirit in every step of her journey. In this, she became the most blessed of all women.

The road to WYD Seoul 2027 will have its challenges. Yet, like Mary, may we entrust ourselves completely to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and walk this journey with courage alongside her. With the love of the Triune God, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the unity of the People of God, the Catholic Church in Korea—journeying together pastorally from the preparation for WYD 2027 Seoul, through the event itself, and into the time beyond—hopes to be renewed as a more dynamic, hope-filled, and authentically synodal Church.

Endnotes

- 1 In the Korean Catholic Church, there is some confusion regarding the term “World Youth Day” or WYD. There are two dimensions to WYD, one being the diocesan WYD held every year, and the other being the international version held every two to four years. In this book, we use WYD to refer to both of them.
- 2 The Holy Father asked that individual dioceses observe this World Youth Day on Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, to commemorate the central aspect of the Christian faith: namely, Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection. However, some dioceses hold it at different times due to local conditions. The Catholic Church in Korea decided to commemorate World Youth Day on the last Sunday of May instead of Palm Sunday (1989 Spring General Assembly of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea (hereinafter CBCK)), and subsequently decided to observe the last Sunday of May as “Youth Sunday” instead of “World Youth Day” (1993 Spring General Assembly of the CBCK).
- 3 The “Message of the Holy Father for World Youth Day” is usually published at the beginning of the year, or before the end of the previous year when WYD is held on an international scale. In South Korea, it is published as the “Message of the Holy Father for Youth Sunday.”
- 4 The host of the international WYD is the Holy Father. He is the

one who decides the country, date, and theme. The next country is usually announced by the Pope himself during the Angelus after the closing Mass of WYD, and it is customary to alternate between Europe and non-Europe.

5 However, minors must have a parent's consent.

6 "Synod" is an ancient and revered term used within the Church's sacred tradition, derived from the preposition *syn* (σύν, meaning "with") and the noun *hodos* (όδός, meaning "way, path"). (Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul, Hamkke geonneun yeojeong-in 'Sinodeu' (Synod) wa Je 16-cha Segye Jugyo Sinodeu Ihaehagi (함께걷는 여정인 '시노드'와 제16차 세계주교시노드 이해하기) (Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul, 2021), 4).

7 Ibid, 12.

8 International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2018), para. 6.

9 Ibid, para. 7.

10 The WYD Seoul 2027 Local Organizing Committee operated the Preliminary Research Team from January 25, 2024 to June 22, 2024. Comprising over 40 members, including clergy, religious, and laypeople of various ages, the team engaged in conversation in the Spirit to consider the direction of youth ministry in Korea and propose key principles for WYD Seoul 2027.

11 Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul, 2024nyeon 10woreul Hanghayeo: Gip-eun Dero Jeo-eo Naga-ra (2024년 10월을 항하여: 깊은 데로 저 어 나아가라), from Je 16-cha Segye Jugyo Sinodeu Seoul Daegyo-gu Jonghap Munseo (제16차 세계주교시노드 서울대교구 종합 문서) (Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul, 2024), para. 6.

12 Choi Hyeon-sun, *Sinodallitaseu* (시노달리타스) (Pauline Books &

Media Korea, 2021), 73–74.

- 13 Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul, Hamkke geonneun yeojeong-in ‘Sinodeu’ (Synod) wa Je 16-cha Segye Jugyo Sinodeu Ihaehagi, 19–20.
- 14 CBCK, Je 16-cha Segye Jugyo Sinodeu Seoul Daegyo-gu Jonghap Munseo (제16차 세계주교시노드 서울대교구 종합 문서) (Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul, 2022).
- 15 CBCK Committee for Youth Ministry, Hanguk Cheonjugyo Cheongsongyeon Samok Jichimseo (한국 천주교 청소년 사목 지침서) (CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF KOREA, 2021), paras. 3–6.
- 16 Currently, youth ministry in Korean churches is categorized into early childhood, elementary, middle and high school, and young adult ministry. Young adult ministry typically targets unmarried individuals aged 20–40, but different criteria are applied by each diocese and parish, making it difficult to classify them accurately. In pastoral settings, distinguishing young adults in their mid-30s and older is particularly challenging, as many of them feel uncomfortable identifying with “young adult” ministry. Even if they wish to join groups of “adults,” most consist primarily of individuals in their 40s and older, with many members in their 50s to 70s, making it difficult for them to feel like they belong in these groups as well.
- 17 CBCK, Hanguk Cheonjugyohoe Tonggye 2017 (한국 천주교회 통계 2017) (CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF KOREA, 2017), based on surveys, analyses, and reports from each diocese (re-quoted from para. 10).
- 18 In response to this, Pope Francis states in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Instead, we waste time talking about ‘what needs to be done’ – in Spanish we call this the sin of ‘habriaqueísmo’ – like spiritual masters and pastoral experts who give instructions from on high. and difficulties of our people” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), para. 96).

19 CBCK Committee for Youth Ministry, *Hanguk Cheonjugyo Cheongsoneyeon Samok Jichimseo*, paras. 7–10.

20 Ibid, paras. 12–14.

21 “Pastoral care for young people must be even more missionary, integrative, educational, experiential, outreaching, and community-oriented, with young people playing a more active role. In today’s world, where uncertainty is growing, all members of the Church—including clergy, religious, and laypeople—are called to overcome the spiritual secularism that weakens the youth ministry outlined above. They must strive to accompany young people with confident faith, guided by the principles and directions presented here” (Ibid, paras. 86–87).

22 Jeong Gyu-hyeon and Oh Se-il, *Cheongsoneyeon Samok gwa Sinodallitas: 『Hanguk Cheonjugyo Cheongsoneyeon Samok Jichimseo』ui samokjeok jeogyong-e gwanhan seongchal* (청소년 사목과 시노달리타스: 『한국 천주교 청소년 사목 지침서』의 사목적 적용에 관한 성찰), *Theology and Philosophy* 46 (2024): 55.

23 Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to Young People and to the Entire People of God, March 25, 2019, para. 209.

24 Jeong Gyu-hyeon and Oh Se-il, *Cheongsoneyeon*, 57.

25 Ibid, 57.

26 CBCK Committee for Youth Ministry, *Hanguk Cheonjugyo Cheongsoneyeon Samok Jichimseo*, para. 87.

27 Jeong Gyu-hyeon and Oh Se-il, *Cheongsoneyeon*, 61.

28 Ibid, 63.

29 Ibid, 63.

30 See Luke 1:35

31 See Luke 1:46–47

32 Vatican News, “Pope at WYD Mass: Church and world need young people ‘like the earth needs rain’” Vatican News, August 6, 2023 <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-08/bring-god-s-radiant-smile-to-all-pope-tells-youth-at-wyd-mass.html>

33 “If, as a result of our own simple and at times costly efforts, we can find points of agreement amid conflict, build bridges and make peace for the benefit of all, then we will experience the miracle of the culture of encounter” (*Christus Vivit*, para. 169).

34 *Christus Vivit*, para. 169.

35 Synod of Bishops, Final Document of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, October 27, 2018, para. 155.

36 For more information, see Chapter 3 “Understanding Korean Youth Ministry”

37 *Christus Vivit*, paras. 38-40.

38 Ibid, para. 174.

39 John 15:15

40 *Christus Vivit*, para. 155.

41 cpbcTV, “2027 세계청년대회 서울이 선택된 이유?!” YouTube video, May 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_Uq41e0Qb8.

42 Ibid.

43 Gallup Korea, “Hangugin-ui Jonggyo 1984-2021 (1): Jonggyo Hyeonhwang” (한국갤럽조사연구소, 「한국인의 종교 1984-2021 (1) 종교 현황」), Gallup Report, April 7, 2021, 6.

44 The theme of the 2025 Jubilee is “Pilgrims of Hope”.

45 Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the International Congress on Youth Ministry of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life,” May 25, 2024.

46 Pope Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025: “Spes Non Confundit”, June 17, 2024.

47 Ibid.

48 Yang Yun-seong, “‘Urineun Asia, Hanguk Cheongnyeon Daehoeseo Mueoseul Baewotna?’ (우리는 아시아, 한국 청년대회에 서 무엇을 배웠나?) ‘Salt+Light,’” re-quoted from the website of the Brazil World Youth Day, <http://Wydcentral.org/>

49 The “young Church” envisioned by Saint John Paul II refers to a Church where the young generation, endowed with the youth and vitality of Jesus Christ, and mature adults who strive to live out the youth of Christ work together.

50 Closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Address of Pope Paul VI to Young Men and Women of the World, December 8, 1965.

51 “Youth is more than simply a period of time; it is a state of mind. That is why an institution as ancient as the Church can experience renewal and a return to youth at different points in her age-old history. Indeed, at the most dramatic moments of her history, she feels called to return with all her heart to her first love” (Christus Vivit, para. 34).

52 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Apostolic Vicariate of Korea (1981), 200th anniversary of the Korean Church (1984), Forty-fourth International Eucharistic Congress (1989)

53 Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the International Congress on Youth Ministry of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life,” May 25, 2024.

54 Ibid.

55 See Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, Zondervan, 1996, p. 573.

56 Research Foundation of Korean Church History, “Inside Hanguk

Cheonjugyoheo”, (인사이트 한국천주교회), 2018, pp. 103–110.

57 Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the International Congress on Youth Ministry of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life,” May 25, 2024.

58 Synod of Bishops, Final Document of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, October 27, 2018, para. 142.

59 Refer to the WYD Seoul 2027 Preliminary Research Team Summary of Proposals.

60 Ibid.

61 cpbcTV, “2027 세계청년대회 서울이 선택된 이유?!” YouTube video, May 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_Uq41e0Qb8.

62 Refer to the WYD Seoul 2027 Preliminary Research Team Summary of Proposals.

63 Ibid.

64 On the role of adults in the church community, Apostolicam Actuositatem states: “Adults ought to engage in such friendly discussion with young people that both age groups, overcoming the age barrier, may become better acquainted and share the special benefits each generation can offer the other. Adults should stimulate young persons first by good example to take part in the apostolate and, if the opportunity presents itself, by offering them effective advice and willing assistance. By the same token young people should cultivate toward adults respect and trust, and although they are naturally attracted to novelties, they should duly appreciate praiseworthy traditions.”

65 St. John Paul II, Christifideles Laici, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, December 30, 1988, para. 46.

66 Ibid, para. 46.

67 Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the International Congress on Youth Ministry of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life,” May 25, 2024.

68 Christus Vivit, para. 213.

69 Ibid, para. 213.

70 Pope Francis said, “Clericalism is a constant temptation on the part of priests who see “the ministry they have received as a power to be exercised, rather than a free and generous service to be offered. It makes us think that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or has anything to learn. Doubtless, such clericalism can make consecrated persons lose respect for the sacred and inalienable worth of each person and of his or her freedom” (Christus Vivit, para. 98).

71 Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Speech given in Santa Barbara, California, US, November 8, 1997. As quoted by Pope Francis, “Show Mercy to Our Common Home: Message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation,” September 1, 2016.

72 Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter: *Laudato Si’*: On Care for Our Common Home, May 24, 2015, para. 22.

73 Christus Vivit, para. 234.

74 Ibid, para. 206.

75 Luke 6:38

76 Luke 1:37

77 Luke 2:35