**World Youth Day 2023- Lisbon - Rise Up!**

The next World Youth Day will take place in Lisbon, 1-6 August 2023. This will be the first since the Pandemic. Pope Francis has invited young people to ‘arise’ and ‘get up from our slumber, waking to the life all around us.’

In his message for World Youth Day he urges young people to follow in the footsteps of Our Lady, going in haste to others and dedicating our lives to Jesus. The theme for the next WYD is ‘Mary arose and went with haste.’ (Luke 1:39)

Undoubtedly participation in Church activities during the pandemic impacted on many ministry programs. Recently I attended an international preparation meeting in advance of World Youth Day and many leaders spoke of how disconnected young people had become over the past three years. During the pandemic I was involved in surveying young adults to determine if they were engaging with faith initiatives online. Essentially, we discovered that many were online, but not with Church. This provides a huge challenge to all engage with youth and young adult ministry.

I have spoken with many in pastoral leadership who concurred that many people, especially young people, have not returned to parish life. Just have a look in your own parish to see this for yourself.

Pope Francis has designated that the Feast of Christ the King as an annual date for World Youth Day to be celebrated in the local Church. Not a lot happened in Ireland for this important date for young people in the Church. Yet the question of youth emerged as one of the recurring themes in the recent Synod process. Even though the national synthesis spoke of ‘deficiencies in the current pastoral practice’, a real opportunity to reach young people was missed this year by many Church leaders by not connecting with young people on the Feast of Christ the King.

Clearly there is a gap in rhetoric and actions.

**Begin Again**

Pope Francis’ opening words of *Christus Vivit*, notes, ‘Christ is alive and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world….I would like to say to every young Christian, Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!’ If we are passionate about bring the message of joy to young people I strongly urge people to take some inspiration as a starting point from *Christus Vivit*.

Clearly, we need to begin again in our outreach to young people. Many have become marginalised even in Church. WYD in Lisbon can provide a moment, a catalyst to kick start how the Church can engage with young people. When a World Youth Day takes place in Europe, it is a great opportunity for countries to mobilise great numbers. Traditionally in Ireland you would expect many hundreds to attend a WYD. WYD in Poland attracted over 1500 from Ireland with dioceses such as Dublin, Armagh and Down & Conor with very large groups. On the basis that there have been some new bishops appointed to dioceses since the last European WYD, it will be interesting to see how they approach WYD in their local dioceses.

Pope Francis invitation to ‘arise with haste’ and reach out to young people is a message for the whole Church. We need to work harder to respond to the ‘signs of our time’. Young people are not coming to us, but we will need leaders who are bold, creative and enthusiastic about inviting and involving young people. If we are to view the Church as a ‘field hospital’ then we can’t stand back and do nothing. Every parish, group or diocese has a responsibility to ‘Rise Up’ and reach out to our young people. Inviting them to go to WYD in a great opportunity to begin again.

**Young People – The Now of God**

Pope Francis in his post synodal reflection *Christus Vivit* noted the young people are the ‘Now’.

He reminded young people that

‘now is the time to set out in haste toward concrete encounters, towards genuine acceptance of those

 different to ourselves.’

Young people who will attend WYD will have an opportunity to experience a Church that is alive and vibrant. It provides a moment to ignite and inspire a new energy for the young Church. Hopefully parishes will respond to this opportunity to reach out and invite young people to consider going on this great pilgrimage to Lisbon WYD. This is the energy we need them to bring to our tired parishes and communities.

Pope Francis concluded his remarks by noting, ‘After a long period of social distancing and isolation, we will all rediscover in Lisbon, with God’s help, the joy of a fraternal embrace between peoples and generations, an embrace of reconciliation and peace… Like Mary, let us arise and go in haste.’

Hopefully many groups will attend WYD from Ireland.

World Youth Day is open to young people aged 16 upwards. Contact your local diocese or movement for more information.

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