



A Quick Look at the *Instrumentum Laboris*

by Jonathan Lewis

In preparation for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, the *Instrumentum Laboris*—the working document from which the synod discussions will begin—has been made available for study, analysis, and other use. There has been much discussion about the document, including some criticism from [Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M.Cap.](#), who is attending the Synod, and a defense of it by [Cardinal Blase J. Cupich](#).

While it is lengthy and wide-ranging, it is a document that provides insight into the conversations what will happen and what we may expect to see in the final document and Apostolic Exhortation. It is the framework of the synod, and it is worth exploring.



Jonathan Lewis, assistant secretary for pastoral ministry and social concerns for the Archdiocese of Washington, was chosen by Pope Francis to attend the as an auditor. During the twenty-five-day synod, Lewis will contribute to the discussions and present a four-minute speech to the participants.

Lewis said he is looking forward to sharing how youth and young adults benefit greatly from spiritual mentorship in their families, peer groups, through intergenerational relationships, and from priests and religious who give authentic witness to the faith. This mentorship is “essential to the formation of young people as missionary disciples and their discernment,” and he hopes to share those thoughts while there.

Lewis shared several noteworthy passages from the *Instrumentum Laboris* and his comments on each:

Transitioning into Adulthood

“In some countries, people get married or choose the priesthood or religious life even before they turn eighteen, whereas elsewhere this happens after thirty, when youth is actually over. In several contexts, transitioning into adulthood has become a long, complicated and non-linear process, where progress and setbacks occur and, in general, job searching prevails over the affective dimension. This makes it harder for young people to make definitive choices and, as

one African bishop's conference pointed out, highlights the need to create a formal framework within which to provide individually tailored support.” (16)

Jonathan Lewis: Millennials (born 1981 to 1996) were encouraged to go to college, graduate school, take a gap year, or start working during the economic downturn. As a result, it has taken us longer to get on our feet and find financial and professional responsibility. It is common for millennials to wait longer than ever before to walk through traditional markers of adulthood—marriage, having kids, buying a house. This reality of delayed adulthood means that young people grow out of the Church's ministry with youth and really have nowhere to go for more than a decade of their life. No wonder young adults drift away from the Church or decide that the Church is no longer relevant to their lives. We have almost forgotten about young adults and it is time to remember them. The synod challenges parishes to prioritize new and creative pastoral outreach to young adults who are searching for relationships of meaning—friends and mentors—to walk with them on this winding road of adulthood.

The Value of Mentors

“Several bishop's conferences point out that, in a context of uncertainty and fear about the future, young people no longer connect to institutions as such, but to the people within them who communicate values with their life testimony.” (60)

“The entire tradition of spirituality insists on the fundamental importance of accompaniment, particularly in the vocational discernment process. The young people of the Pre-Synodal Meeting expressed this need repeatedly, underlining in particular the importance of the testimony and the humanity of their mentors. Many Bishop's Conferences also underscored how young people are asking church leaders to be willing to provide this service and highlight how often the latter have a hard time ensuring this.” (120)

Lewis: Unlike past generations, young people do not trust institutional authority, but the authority of personal relationships. Young people will find the Church credible and reliable when they personally get to know credible, faith-filled, honest witnesses. Isn't this true in your life? Or in the lives of young people you know? Don't each of us have role models, teachers, and spiritual mentors who witnessed to us a life of holiness? Perhaps a trusted priest, or a stellar coach, a faithful family member? Many young people cannot say this for themselves. The absence of spiritual mentors in our families and parishes lies at the heart of the crisis of disaffiliation and vocational discernment among young people. I hope that this Synod calls every baptized person, young and old, to be a spiritual mentor to another person in their life. This involves one on one efforts, as well as adapting the process of parish registration, RCIA, Marriage Preparation, Baptism Preparation, etc., in a way that builds long term spiritual relationships, not just short term classes.

Clarification of Vocation

“The meaning of the term ‘vocation’ needs to be clarified. Caring about all young people, without exception, the synod is asked to shed light in a convincing way on the vocational horizon of human existence as such. The young themselves are asking the Church to help them ‘find a simple and clear understanding of vocation’ (Pre-Synodal Meeting, 8). From the responses of various Bishop’s Conferences, and also from many comments made by the young themselves, we understand that the term vocation is generally used to indicate vocations to the ordained ministry and special consecration. One bishop’s conference argues that ‘a weak point of pastoral care, in discerning young people’s vocations, is that it limits the notion of vocation only to the choice of the ministerial priesthood or consecrated life.’”(85)

Lewis: When I was younger, we used to talk about “small v” and “big V” vocations. “Small v” vocations were the callings of daily life—a job, college choice, and the like. “Big V” vocations were the once-in-a-lifetime decision to a sacramental vocation that for some reason seemed more real and important and easily became a preoccupation. The synod turns this capitalization on its head and proposes an expansive understanding of vocation that begins with our primary vocation to holiness, rooted in Baptism. This call to holiness is not a one-time decision, but manifests itself in the decisions of daily life. We should pray in our parishes that the Holy Spirit call forth young people to live out this vocation to holiness, not just a vocation to priesthood. The Church will inspire discerning men and women to choose Holy Orders and sacramental marriage to the extent to which the Church calls young people to radical holiness.

Living Liturgy

“One bishop’s conference argues that young people ‘do not come to Church to find something they can get elsewhere, but are looking for a true and even radical religious experience.’ Many answers to the questionnaire show that young people are sensitive to the quality of the liturgy. In a provocative way, the Pre-Synodal Meeting states that ‘Christians profess a living God, but some attend Masses or belong to communities which seem dead’ (Pre-Synodal Meeting 7). Regarding the language and quality of homilies, one bishop’s conference points out that ‘young people do not feel in tune with the Church’, and adds: ‘It seems as if we do not understand young people’s vocabulary and, therefore, also their needs’”(187).

Lewis: Our world is busier, more digitally connected and more distracted than ever before. In the midst of constant noise, young people long for an inner peace and silence that can reach from our ears to our heart. We are hungry for goodness, truth, and beauty that connect us to something beyond our ordinary experiences of daily life and something that we can look back on as a touchstone of our faith. This is why retreats, pilgrimages, mission trips, liturgies, and popular piety attract young people today. We are longing for an encounter with a living God—a person—whom we can carry with us into our families, schools, and workplaces. These experiences help us remember God in a secular world that is begging us to forget. Parishes should reflect on the quality of the Sunday Mass experience in terms of hospitality, music, preaching, and reverence, as well as how frequently it provides experiences such as retreats, adoration, and confession for parishioners of all ages.