

Abbreviated Version

Celebrating Youth and Young Adults Annually

*on the Solemnity of Jesus Christ, King
of the Universe, in solidarity with
the Global Celebration of Young People*

A Resource for Local Catholic Leaders



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth | Washington DC

A Prayer for Youth and Young Adults

Jesus Christ, King of the Universe,
to you we turn in humble prayer.
Look with favor upon all young people,
bearers of hope for the Church and the world.

Jesus Christ, companion
of youth and young adults,
bless the paths of discovery and discernment,
through times of joy and experiences of hardship,
with the constant love and support of your Church.

Jesus Christ, alive in the hearts
of all your people,
grant that we may
“journey together, young and old...
to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge,
awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom.” *

Jesus Christ, Redeemer of all humankind,
open our hearts to encounter all young people,
to accompany and be in community together,
and as one Church, embark upon our holy mission.

Jesus Christ, in the company
of the Father and the Holy Spirit,
graciously hear our prayer
and be with us forevermore.

Amen.

* *Pope Francis, Christus Vivit, 199*

Introduction

This *Abbreviated Version* of the [National Pastoral Guidebook for the Celebration of Young People](#) is being released to help local communities (in parishes, dioceses, eparchies, high school and college campuses, religious congregations, apostolates, and Catholic organizations) observe the “**Global Celebration of Young People**” as envisioned by Pope Francis and the U.S. Bishops when they promulgated (in November 2020 and March 2021, respectively) that all Catholics commemorate young people annually on Christ the King Sunday.

This *Abbreviated Version* and the long-form *Guidebook* include suggestions and ideas for local implementation related to the outreach, liturgy, ministry, and pastoral actions of a community. They were developed in collaboration with pastoral leaders in youth, campus, and young adult ministries, have the affirmation of the USCCB Secretariats of Doctrine, Divine Worship, and Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, and are grounded in the Holy See’s [Pastoral Guidelines for the Celebration of World Youth Day in the Particular Churches](#) (2021).

Before proceeding, an important note on terminology used throughout the text; first, it is important to recognize the audience of the celebration: *youth and young adults*. In the United States, those terms have very distinct meanings; throughout this guidebook and in other complementary USCCB materials, these terms will be used:

- “**Youth**” refers to adolescents, ages 12 to 18, in junior high and high school.
- “**Young adults**” refers to women and men, ages 18 to 39, inclusive of collegians, singles, and couples.
- “**Young people**” refers to the combination of both groups (youth and young adults) together.

It should be noted that adolescence and young adulthood are distinct developmental stages in life, and as such, should not be confused for one another. The needs of youth ages 12-18 are vastly different than the needs of young adults ages 18-39. Hence, our ministerial response to their respective needs must also be different. It is highly recommended that local communities across the United States seek out ways to acknowledge each of these respective demographics distinctively on their own, being sensitive to the nuances within each age group.

The global Catholic Church calls this annual celebration “World Youth Day” to remind people that every year is an opportunity to celebrate and accompany young people. However, because the term “World Youth Day” is often associated with the major international event that has taken place every two or three years since 1985 (and due to the aforementioned notes about terms related to young people), we in the United States refer to the Christ the King Sunday experience as the “Global Celebration of Young People.”

Getting Started

Good planning and coordination are required to create a successful celebration in the local community. At the onset, the pastor or pastoral leader accompanying or coordinating ministries with youth and/or young adults (at a parish), the chaplain or campus minister (at a high school or college campus), or the director or coordinator overseeing the Church’s ministries with youth, collegians, and/or young adults (at the diocese or eparchy) must **understand the goals or cornerstones of the celebration**, as outlined in the [Pastoral Guidelines](#):

1. Give young people a *festival of faith* experience.
2. Help young people have an *experience of Church*.
3. Provide young people with a *missionary experience*.
4. Offer young people an *opportunity for vocational discernment*.
5. Accompany young people on an *experience of pilgrimage*.
6. Open young people to an *experience of universal fraternity*.

These six goals or cornerstones are excellent benchmarks to guide all of your planning in implementing the celebration on any level in the life of the Church.

When getting started, the key questions that planners will want to consider include:

- **What are your goals and themes?** Consider the global theme set annually by the Holy See, as well as the life of the local community, and how they intersect with the six cornerstones just mentioned.
- **Who is the audience?** Consider youth and/or young adults, as well as different cultures, communities, and abilities, especially asking the question: "Who is missing around our table?"
- **When will this take place?** Consider the timing: on Christ the King Sunday, at Mass, etc.
- **Where will this take place?** Consider the location: in the church, off-site, online, etc.
- **How are this communicated?** Consider how young people and the community will learn of this.

All these questions can help give shape to the activities chosen and give a focus for the liturgical ministers, pastoral leaders, and guests who are part of the local implementation of this Global Celebration.

One of the first decisions that will need to be made is the *scope* of the parish's "Celebration of Young People." This occasion is often centered around Christ the King Sunday and aimed at both youth and young adults. However, for pastoral reasons, a community can feel free to extend or change their celebration timing and/or aim the focus toward one or several different groupings of young people over the course of the month.

Components of the Celebration

The various components of the Celebration of Young People at the local level can include, but are not limited to:

The Sunday Mass during the Solemnity of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (or an alternate date).

- Featuring young people taking *prominent liturgical roles or leading music*
- Featuring young people being *giving testimony or witness*
- Integrating the Global Celebration of Young People and/or its themes into the *homily*
- Incorporating special petitions about young people during the *Prayer of the Faithful*
- Closing with a *special blessing* over young people, at one or more of the Masses

An increase in ministerial activities and events for or about young people at the church or campus, *leading up to* and *following* Christ the King Sunday, as well as around that weekend's liturgies.

A greater community awareness about youth and young adults for adult parishioners and active community members in the week(s) *leading up to* and *following* Christ the King Sunday.

A renewed evangelization effort toward and with young people by adult parishioners and active community members in the week(s) *leading up to* and *following* Christ the King Sunday

An enhanced accompaniment and engagement with young people by adult parishioners and active community members in the week(s) *leading up to* and *following* Christ the King Sunday

A robust communication campaign around young people within the community, *leading up to* and *following* Christ the King Sunday. Consider a vibrant social media campaign to draw attention to the Global Celebration.

An Opportunity to Dialogue

The celebration (especially the lead-up towards the Solemnity of Christ the King) can also be an annual opportunity for pastoral leaders and adult parishioners of all generations to engage more in *synodal dialogue, listening, and accompaniment* with youth and/or young adults in their local area, inclusive of connecting with younger family members and others who are less active in the practice of their faith.

The first step is engaging the young person, getting to know them and their current realities. These questions or conversation starters are adapted from the guides from the *National Dialogue on Catholic Pastoral Ministries with Youth and Young Adults* (see <https://nationaldialogue.info/conversation/>).

- What brings you joy in your life right now?
- What challenges are you facing in your life right now?
- What can the Church (or what can I) do to support you in your life and/or your Catholic faith?
- Describe a time when your Catholic faith made a difference in your life.
- What are three words that describe your experience of the Catholic faith or the Church?

The second step is following up with gratitude and an invitation to more:

- Every year, the Catholic Church around the world sets aside one of its most important feasts (Christ the King Sunday) to focus and celebrate every youth and young adult in the world, regardless of their past or faith engagement. We call this a *Global Celebration of Young People*.
- Pope Francis has this message for you: “(Christ) is in you, he is with you, and he never abandons you. However far you may wander, he is always there, the Risen One. He calls you and he waits for you to return to him and start over again. When you feel you are growing old out of sorrow, resentment or fear, doubt, or failure, he will always be there to restore your strength and your hope” (*Christus Vivit 2*). In other words, our Church wants to be close to you just like Jesus and we want to reflect that in our words, actions, embrace, and concrete help (cf. *Christus Vivit 77*).
- We invite you to join us at our next Celebration of Young People on Christ the King Sunday, so that we can celebrate you for who God created you to be, and to let you know of our support – both as a global community of faith and as a local experience of Church.

Considerations for the Liturgical Celebration

The Solemnity of Christ the King, the final Sunday of the liturgical calendar (on the weekend before the First Sunday of Advent), falls between November 20 and 26 in any given year. It should also be noted that the U.S. holiday of Thanksgiving is also proximate to the Global Celebration of Young People and that the USCCB has designated that Christ the King Sunday be a moment to focus on religious freedom, so some consideration should be given how to tie these occasions together.

With the Eucharist as the “source and summit” of Christian life, and the liturgical celebration as the unifying element in any Eucharistic assembly, the *liturgical focus* of the local implementation of the Global Celebration of Young People should be given primary attention in planning efforts. Young people should be considered as elemental to the full complement of liturgical ministers: planners, art and environment ministers, hospitality ministers, ushers, sacristans, music ministers, readers, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, and any other liturgical role available to them within the parish, campus ministry, diocese, eparchy, or apostolate.

The USCCB has developed a special [Christ the King Sunday Liturgical Guide](#) that can be used for Christ the King Sunday (or an alternate date chosen by the local community) with more details on the following components. The local community should consider each of these in their planning efforts:

- **Liturgical Environment** – Develop a team of young people to assist with art and environment for these Masses, which can be set up under the direction of the liturgy coordinator for this celebration.
- **Liturgical Music** – Identify young people who are talented vocalists and instrumentalists. Coordinate with the music director to involve young people in providing the music for the liturgy, including the selecting of liturgically appropriate music. When considering selections: as a group, read through the readings for the liturgy and give time for reflection reflect on the readings for the liturgy and then the songs being chosen.
- **Lectors and Readers** – Identify young people who are skilled at reading in public to proclaim the Word. Coordinate with the liturgical director or the ministry leader coordinating lectors to ensure they are scheduled and receive any necessary training on reading at Mass in your community.
- **The Homily** – The homily for Christ the King Sunday is at the discretion of the presider; however, care should be taken to incorporate the celebration of young people, the Holy Father’s annual theme, or other elements into the message. Homily ideas can be found in the [Liturgical Guide](#).
- **The Prayer of the Faithful** – Invite young people to write or assist in writing the prayer of the faithful for the liturgy. Examples of the prayer of the faithful can be found in the [Liturgical Guide](#).
- **The Preparation of the Gifts** – Select young people (youth, college students, and young adults) that represent the diversity of the community to bring the gifts to the altar.
- **The Collection** – This is an opportunity to ask the community to invest in young people through their generous support during the collection. Work with the parish finance council or pastoral council to ensure this is permissible to allocate all or a portion of that weekend’s gifts to ministries with youth and/or young adults in the community or at the diocese. A second collection can also be taken for this specific purpose, depending on the permission from parish leadership.
- **Witness or Testimony** – At the discretion of the pastor, parish leadership, or liturgical director, a young person may offer witness or testimony at an appropriate time before, during, or after the Mass. During the Mass, this reflection never replaces the homily but takes place during the announcements following the Prayer after Communion. This youth and/or young adult should be comfortable with public speaking and keep their reflection brief and on point. This can be a great chance for the community to hear their story and better appreciate the gift of young people in the Church.
- **A Blessing of Young People** – At the discretion of the pastor, parish leadership, or liturgical director, a special blessing may be offered to all youth and/or young adults who are present at the Mass (or at all Masses that weekend). The approved “Special Blessing Options” can be found in the [Liturgical Guide](#).
- **A Prayer for Youth and Young Adults** – Consider using “A Prayer for Youth and Young Adults,” found at the beginning of this *Guidebook*, at some point during the liturgy. One suggestion is to use this prayer after the Prayer of the Faithful; however, at the discretion of the pastor, parish leaders, or liturgical director, this special prayer can also be read at another part of the Mass. Ideally, it should be read by all present in the assembly. The community may also wish to print copies of the prayer and place them in the pews and/or feature it prominently on the community’s web and social media pages.

Engaging Specific Populations and Communities

Included here are a few ideas taken from the longer-form [Guidebook](#). Refer to that resource for more details and information on integrating the Global Celebration of Young People in the settings listed here.

Catholic High Schools

It is a gift and a privilege to have and to celebrate Catholic *identity* in a Catholic high school setting. Even though not all students and families are Catholic, it is still appropriate to celebrate the young people entrusted to the care of the school. Some ideas to recognize young people in this setting include:

- Theology Department chairs including mention of the celebration with teachers and faculty.
- Including instruction or lesson plans around Jesus Christ as King of the Universe or the Holy Father's exhortation *Christus Vivit* for the days leading up to the Solemnity of Christ the King.
- Holding a school-wide Mass near the date of Christ the King Sunday, focused on the themes of gratitude (being so near to Thanksgiving) and/or the annual theme for the celebration.
- Incorporating young saints and faith contributions of young people into daily announcements and prayer, as well as social media and bulletin boards.
- Reaching out to young alumni, parents, and supporters of the school, especially those who may be in their young adult years (in their 20s and 30s).

Catholic Universities

Catholic institutions of higher learning have a rich diversity in its students and its faculties. Young adults studying at Catholic colleges and universities are ideally formed to become *leaders* (or "protagonists" as Pope Francis calls them, cf. CV 174) in the community. Christ the King Sunday celebrations will vary depending on institution or campus size, residential or commuter students, as well as academic schedule. Consider the following ways to mark Christ the King Sunday within the university:

- Campus programs, theology classes, or other appropriate venues may include instruction around *Christus Vivit*, Christology, and its application for understanding Jesus as King of the Universe.
- Hosting special Masses held on campus framed around the Global Celebration of Young People and connected to the Solemnity of Christ the King. Depending on the campus size and weather, a Eucharistic procession, adoration, or rosary walk may be possible.
- Collaborating with young adults at local parishes, around the diocese, with other Catholic ministries, and with campus ministries at nearby non-Catholic universities around Christ the King.
- Offering students experiences of *lectio divina* around the readings for Christ the King Sunday.
- Encouraging families and friends of college students to send letters or care packages around Christ the King Sunday, especially in advance of the holidays and semester finals.
- Communicating with and working in collaboration with Catholic parishes to point students towards the local celebrations taking place in their home communities over the holidays. (NOTE: This collaboration can be a great way to help students better connect with the universal Catholic community beyond their college campus experience; it can also be a way to connect students at four-year institutions with those at community colleges and with their peers not attending college).

Young People with Disabilities and the Deaf Community

All young people have a giftedness to be shared with the Church. To celebrate Christ the King Sunday with young people with physical and mental disabilities, planning should be taken that respects their human *dignity* and allows for flexibility for them and their families. Young people with disabilities and the deaf community should be invited and included in parish and diocesan/eparchial celebrations of Christ the King Sunday. An inclusive environment can be planned and present at the parish or diocese. General tips for inclusion include:

- Giving a significant amount of notice to and personally invite young people with disabilities and the deaf community to the celebration – at the parish, diocese/eparchy, campus, or elsewhere.
- Inviting caregivers or family members to attend with their young person.
- For those who are sensitive to sensory stimulation, having a quiet room available where young people and/or their caregivers can take the necessary break(s).
- For young people in the deaf community, having printed materials available, utilizing art, and having an ASL/sign language interpreter at liturgies and talks.
- Hosting a special Mass and/or shared meal for celebrating youth and/or young adults with physical or mental disabilities and for their families and caregivers. Flexibility and adaptability will need to be fully integrated to the planning and implementation of this special gathering.

Young People in Military Communities

In celebrating Christ the King with youth and young adults in military communities, it is important to incorporate the sense of *belonging* in the Church. As military families and young people in the military move frequently due to new assignments, it can be helpful to remind them, particularly through celebrating young people, that wherever they go, they have a place that can be home, familiar, safe, and warm in the Church. Ideas include:

- Celebrating Christ the King Sunday Mass on base or at a nearby parish, incorporating a sense of local and global belonging, as well as the annual theme for the Global Celebration.
- Faith formation on military bases focusing on Christ as king and leader, and the contributions young people like them are making to the Church, the community, and the country they serve.
- Encouraging respected and trusted adults in the area or on base to make personal and appropriate connections to young adults through meaningful conversations, cards, meals, and outreach efforts. Care and sensitivity should also be shown towards youth whose parents are deployed or are preparing for deployment, or who have lost a family member while serving.
- Care packages or letters can be sent from dioceses, eparchies, and/or parish communities to the young adults serving in the military on or around Christ the King Sunday. Pay attention to regulations and time it may take for these parcels to arrive and plan accordingly.

Incarcerated Youth and Young Adults

In celebrating Christ the King with incarcerated youth and young adults, it is important to emphasize the unity and the *connectedness* that Christ offers to all believers. Incarcerated youth and young adults may experience separation, isolation, and loneliness in more profound ways than their peers. It is important to encourage and to affirm these young people, to infuse and to recognize hope they often feel is lacking. Ideas include:

- Involving the local/regional community in reaching out to incarcerated youth and young adults for Christ the King Sunday with visits, letters, calls, or care packages (pending necessary regulations).

- When possible, priests and ministry leaders should time their regular visit with young people in local jails and prisons around Christ the King Sunday and speak about the annual theme for the Celebration.
- Trusted adults in regular contact with incarcerated young people, including family members and those in prison ministry, should be alerted to the Global Celebration of Young People and be provided with resources like the *Guidebook* to support those under their care and attention.
- Celebrating Mass on Christ the King Sunday (or an alternate date) or encouraging incarcerated young people to participate in Mass through broadcast or live stream, as well as reading and discussing the readings for the day using the homily and small group notes in the *Guidebook*.

Young People in Hospital Care or with Special Needs

Young people experience pain and hurt in many ways – spiritually, emotionally, and physically. It is important for young people in these situations to be invited into a *healing* relationship with Christ, the divine physician. It is crucial that young people experiencing medical/health challenges feel remembered, seen, and loved by the entire community of faith. Ideas include:

- Alerting chaplains and other ministry leaders to the Global Celebration of Young People and seek to find creative ways to affirm young people in hospital care and with special needs. Visits from pastors, priests, or other trusted adults can be scheduled near Christ the King Sunday.
- Partnering with families, friends, and supporters in affirming young people in hospital care. Those who accompany young people in these situations can also be supported in their work.
- Writing letters, sending care packages, and offering a spiritual bouquet are ways that the local community can show affirmation, hope, and encouragement.
- Arranging for Christ the King Mass or other celebrations to be broadcast or live streamed for young people in hospital care or unable to attend in person, encouraging them to feel connected during any special blessings or in the Prayer of the Faithful.

Universal Church Celebrations

While the central focus of the Global Celebration of Young People should be centered on the local community, **there can be occasions to celebrate young people on the diocesan, eparchial, regional, or national level.** It should also be noted that, each year, the Holy Father joins with young people from the Diocese of Rome (and from around the world) for the Christ the King Sunday Mass at the Vatican.

Local communities can join in solidarity with these universal Church celebrations online and by other media. There may also be occasions when the diocese or eparchy, overseen by a bishop or eparch, may wish to celebrate youth and/or young adults living within their boundaries. Celebrations can include a special Mass with the bishop/eparch, diocesan youth or young adult events, media campaigns, speaker series, justice work, or a diocesan training for pastoral leaders on engaging and accompanying young people.

Whatever is done should always be coordinated with the local communities, to point youth and young adults towards experiences of the Church in their neighborhood, community, campus, or region; however, these universal celebrations can also be great ways to connect with young people who may not feel at home in a parish or within a particular local apostolate or ministry.

More ideas and resources on celebrating beyond the parish can be found in the longer-form [Guidebook](#).

Going Forward

Pope Francis concluded his apostolic exhortation on young people with a wish, noting “my joyful hope is to see you keep running the race before you, outstripping all those who are slow or fearful, Keep running, ‘attracted by the face of Christ, whom we love so much...’” (CV 299).

The face of Christ the King is present in Word and Sacrament, in youth and young adults, and in the heart of every person doing God’s work in the Church and in society.

For local communities, these annual festive celebrations of young people on Christ the King Sunday “can provide a welcome break in their routine and help them experience the joy of faith” (CV 224). They give every parish, campus, diocese, eparchy, apostolate, and organization which hosts these celebratory moments an opportunity to thank God for the gift of young people in their lives, to remind all generations of their importance and worth, and to motivate and renew youth and young adults for their mission and vocation in the world.

The Holy Father and the bishops of the United States, therefore, encourage every Catholic community to set aside one moment each year to honor and celebrate young people.

This annual celebration can be done on or around the Solemnity of Christ the King, in solidarity with dioceses and eparchies around the world, or for pastoral reasons, at another suitable time. It can be done simply or extensively, for a day or a week or longer. It can be aimed at youth or young adults or both groups – either together or at distinct and separate times. It should certainly involve the liturgical life of a Eucharistic community, but can also include elements of formation, networking, dialogue, social justice, and pilgrimage. Regardless of its structure or breadth, these occasions should always involve the entire community as much as possible and be a public witness of the Church about, for, and with youth and young adults.

The longer-form *Guidebook* offers initial suggestions as to the possibilities and considerations for parishes, campuses, apostolates, dioceses, eparchies, and other groups in their annual celebrations, and the USCCB will provide supplementary materials each year that correspond to the current theme and other developments. However, the application of those ideas is dependent on the needs and realities of the community and is at the primary discretion of the local pastors and/or pastoral leaders and teams accompanying young people.

The final tip we offer is to constantly pray for one another in this work – for guidance and vision to make this endeavor fruitful and holy. There are pastoral ministers around the globe who, in their own ways, are celebrating youth and young adults, and our joint prayer (for the young and for each other) is critical to this effort. This universal prayer, then, is to Jesus Christ, king of the universe, whose feast we honor with this celebration and who keeps us always in his sacred heart.

Let us entrust the path of this ministry to Mary, the Immaculate Conception, patroness of the United States, of whom the Holy Father says, “under the gaze of our Mother, there is room only for the silence of hope.” (CV 48).

This abbreviated version of the Guidebook is made possible by the USCCB Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth and generous collaborators who supported its development. For more details and resources, go online to <https://www.usccb.org/topics/world-youth-day/annual-celebration>.

Copyright © 2021, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved.