



The Holy See

***LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL EDUARDO FRANCISCO PIRONIO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SEMINAR
ON WORLD YOUTH DAYS
ORGANIZED IN CZESTOCHOWA***

*Your Eminence*¹. It was with great joy that I learnt that the Pontifical Council for the Laity had organized at the Shrine of Jasna Góra, Czestochowa, a Seminar on World Youth Days. I am very pleased at this initiative and could not let it pass without offering a word of encouragement to the participants, and also expressing my grateful appreciation for all that has been done for the young people of the world. Firstly, how can we not thank God for the numerous fruits produced by World Youth Days on many different levels? The first meeting held in St Peter's Square on Palm Sunday 1986, started a tradition of world and diocesan gatherings in alternate years, underlining, as it were, the twofold dimension, local and universal, of young people's indispensable apostolic commitment. The Days in fact were born, also in response to an initiative of young people themselves, of a desire to offer them a significant "break" on the on-going pilgrimage of faith, which is indeed nurtured by meetings with young people of other nations and sharing respective experiences. The principal objective of the Days is to make the person of Jesus the centre of the faith and life of every young person so that he may be their constant point of reference and also the inspiration of every initiative and commitment for the education of the new generations. This is the slogan of every Youth Day, and through this decade, the Days have been like an uninterrupted and pressing call to build life and faith upon the rock, who is Christ.² So young people are called periodically to make a pilgrimage along the roads of the world. In young people the Church sees herself and her mission to mankind: with them she faces the challenges of the future, aware that all humanity needs to be rejuvenated in spirit. This pilgrimage of the young members of the people builds bridges of brotherhood and hope between continents, peoples and cultures. It is a journey which is always in action, like life, like youth. With the passing years, World Youth Days have proved themselves to be not conventional rites, but providential events, occasions for young people to profess and proclaim faith in Christ with ever greater joy. Coming together, they are able to discuss their most intimate aspirations, experience the Church as communion, make a commitment to the urgent task of new evangelization. And in doing so, they join hands, forming an immense circle of friendship, uniting in faith in the Risen Lord all the different races and nations, cultures and experiences.³ World Youth Day is the Church's Day for youth and with youth. This idea is not an alternative to ordinary youth ministry, often carried out with great sacrifice and self-denial. Indeed it intends actually to consolidate this work by offering new encouragement for commitment, objectives which foster ever greater involvement and participation. By aiming to foster greater fervour in apostolate among young people, on no account the Church desires to isolate them from the rest of the community, but rather make them the protagonists of an apostolate which will

spread to the other ages and situations of life in the ambit of "new evangelization". The different moments of which a Youth Day is composed, form a sort of prolonged catechesis, a proclamation of the path of conversion to Christ, starting from the deepest experiences and questions of the daily life of the addressees. The Word of God is the central point, catechetical reflection is the method, prayer is the nutriment, and communication and dialogue, the style. A Youth Day offers a young person a vivid experience of faith and communion, which will help to face the profound questions of life and to responsibly assume his or her place in society and in the ecclesial community.⁴ During these unforgettable Youth Meetings, I have often been deeply touched by young peoples' joyous, spontaneous love for God and for the Church. They tell of suffering borne for the Gospel, of apparently irremovable obstacles overcome with God's help: they speak of their anguish before a world tormented by despair, cynicism and conflict. Each new Meeting, leaves me with an ever greater desire to praise God for revealing to young ones the secrets of his Kingdom (*Mt 11,25*). The experience of Youth Days is an invitation to all of us, Bishops and pastoral workers, to constant reflection on our ministry among young people and the responsibility which we have to present to them the whole truth about Christ and his Church. How can we not interpret their massive, willing and enthusiastic participation, as a constant demand to be accompanied on the pilgrimage of faith, on the journey which they undertake in response to God's grace working in their hearts? They ask us to lead them to Christ, the only One who has words of eternal life (cf *Jn 6,68*). Listening to young people and teaching them, requires attention, time and wisdom. Youth ministry is one of the Church's priorities on the threshold of the third millennium. With their enthusiasm and their exuberant energy, young people ask to be encouraged to become "leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society" (*Cristifideles laici*, 46). In this way young people, in whom the Church recognises her own youth as the Bride of Christ (cf *Eph 5,22-33*), are not only evangelized, they also become evangelizers who carry the Gospel to their peers, even to those who do not know the Church and have not yet heard the Good News.⁵ While I exhort all those responsible for youth ministry to make use of World Youth Days, with ever greater generosity and creativity, as events which, inserted in the normal process of education in the faith, may become the privileged manifestation of the whole Church's attention for the young generations and her confidence in them, I hope that the meeting in Czestochowa will help and stimulate the participants' reflection so that they may discover new and more efficacious ways of proposing the faith to young people. Entrusting the work of the Seminar to the powerful intercession of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, Mother of young people, I gladly impart to you, Your Eminence, your collaborators, the participants and all whom they represent and carry in their hearts, my special Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, May 8th 1996*

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