



Young Discipleship

INTRODUCTION

The Melbourne Synod is an invitation to our local Church to listen attentively to the Holy Spirit and to discern how we are called to proclaim the Gospel more faithfully in our time and place. The purpose of this synod is to help shape our evangelical and missionary priorities for the years ahead. This synodal journey will focus on three themes: Young Discipleship, Missionary Leadership, and Formation and Participation.

This paper has been prepared to assist with reflection on the theme of Young Discipleship. As we reflect on this theme, we are encouraged to ponder: Where is the Holy Spirit leading our Archdiocese at this time? How are we being called to accompany our young people in faith more intentionally? How might we reflect the face of Christ more clearly in our local Church?

This paper aims to foster a spirit of hope and imagination—trusting that, as we walk together, God is calling us into a future marked by faithfulness, renewal and deeper communion.

THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

‘Come after me and I will make you
fishers of people.’

—Matthew 4:19

The call to discipleship—to follow Jesus—is shaped by the Gospel. The Gospel invites every person to follow Jesus Christ and to share in the mission of building God’s kingdom.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ invite people of faith to encounter the living God. Jesus, through his preaching, teaching

and healing, reveals God’s love and seeks to heal and restore creation. This encounter invites every person into relationship, transformation and mission.

To be a disciple, a follower of Jesus, is to keep company with Jesus, to be ‘called ... out of the darkness into his wonderful light’ (1 Peter 2:9) and to live in an intimate relationship with him (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Discipleship is a lifelong journey. It unfolds through the daily walk of lived experience in faith, in the sacramental life of the Church and with the support of a community that accompanies, nurtures and sustains. This accompaniment not only supports people in their faith journey; it also equips them to share it. Disciples are called to become missionary disciples—people who bring the Good News of God’s healing and forgiveness to the world.

At the heart of discipleship is the call to believe. Faith is more than an agreement with ideas; it is the discovery of being personally chosen and loved by God: ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you’ (John 15:16). Discipleship continually draws us back to Jesus—to learn from him, follow his example and live as he lived.

True discipleship rests on three essential pillars:

- *encounter*: meeting Jesus personally
- *engage*: a commitment to growing more deeply in faith
- *embark*: a commitment to living a life of mission.



In addressing young people prior to the local celebrations of World Youth Day in 2025, Pope Leo XIV noted that:

when Jesus tells us, ‘Be witnesses,’ he is assuring us that he considers us as his friends. He alone fully knows who we are and why we are here; young people, he knows your heart, your indignation in the face of discrimination and injustice, your desire for truth and beauty, for joy and peace. Through his friendship, he listens to you, motivates you, and guides you, calling each of you to a new life.

ENCOUNTER: THE FOUNDATION OF DISCIPLESHIP

Encounter is the moment, or series of moments, in which a person becomes aware that God is real, present and personally involved in their life. It is the discovery of being known and loved by Christ, and the awakening of a desire to respond to that love. Often, this begins quietly—through the witness of others, through a sense of belonging or through moments of reflection and openness. It is nurtured in environments where trust, authenticity and genuine relationships are present. It can sometimes be presumed that young people have already encountered Christ when opportunities for catechesis or being sent out on mission are provided. The first step is being invited to a personal relationship with Jesus.

At its heart, encounter reveals that Jesus is not a figure of the past but one who is alive and active today. When this happens, faith shifts from abstract belief to lived experience—it becomes personal and transformative.

An experience of encounter with Jesus can be difficult to understand, and accompaniment is essential. Through accompaniment, young people can come to see how this encounter shapes their identity and story. It can lead to a response to follow him; to the ongoing assimilation of the *kerygma* into every aspect of life; to growing in knowledge and love of Jesus; and to discerning the unique call of Jesus to live a life of mission, sharing the Gospel, building the kingdom and witnessing the joy of the Good News to others.

Research in Australia and [internationally](#) suggests that Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) is not closed to Jesus. Rather, many are waiting for authentic witnesses who can help them encounter him personally. A key discipleship challenge, therefore, is helping young people move from ‘Jesus was good’ to ‘Jesus is alive and I can know him personally.’

Effective ministry creates spaces where young people can:

- hear personal testimony
- experience meaningful prayer
- participate in beautiful and authentic worship
- encounter Scripture as a living word.

ENGAGE: THE ONGOING DEEPENING OF FAITH

After encountering Jesus, the next step is to grow in relationship with him and to allow the message of the Gospel to shape every aspect of life. This includes:

- growing in prayer
- participating in the sacramental life of the Church
- building meaningful relationships within a community of faith.

Many young people have come to appreciate silence and closeness to God. Groups that gather to adore the Blessed Sacrament or to pray with the word of God have also increased. We should never underestimate the ability of young people to be open to contemplative prayer. We need only find the right ways and means to help them embark on this precious experience. When it comes to worship and prayer, ‘in many settings, young Catholics are asking for prayer opportunities and sacramental celebrations capable of speaking to their daily lives through a fresh, authentic and joyful liturgy.’

—Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, §224
(quoting *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, Final Document of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2018).

This journey often begins in the home, long before a young person experiences Church programs, schools, ministries or pilgrimages. They first encounter love, belonging, forgiveness and the possibility of faith within the home. As Pope Francis reminds us, the family is the first place of accompaniment (*Christus vivit*, §242). He acknowledges that while families are imperfect, they remain places where young people can experience patience, reconciliation and enduring love.

Intergenerational relationships—between parents, grandparents and wider family networks—play a crucial role. In an increasingly fragmented and individualistic culture, these relationships can foster resilience, belonging and openness to God.

Deepening faith involves the whole person: heart, mind and soul. It calls for:

- intellectual formation (understanding the faith)
- spiritual growth (prayer and sacramental life)
- human and moral development.

It also requires safe spaces where young people can ask honest questions and wrestle with complexity.

[Research shows](#) that Gen Z is drawn to authenticity and coherence. They are drawn to a faith that is lived, not simply taught and are deeply concerned with [questions of identity and purpose](#). Effective engagement is:

- relational rather than transactional
- dialogical rather than purely instructional
- connected to life.

In this context, mentors, leaders, teachers and peers make a profound difference when they:

- listen deeply
- offer consistent accompaniment
- foster trust
- create spaces for openness and curiosity
- build intentional relationships and build community
- encourage leadership
- model a life of prayer and missionary discipleship.

Local Churches should encourage, sustain and accompany those who are engaged in mission in the digital environment. Christian digital communities and groups, particularly young people, are also called to reflect on how they create bonds of belonging, promoting encounter and dialogue. They need to offer formation among their peers, developing a synodal way of being Church. The internet, constituted as a web of connections, offers new opportunities to better live the synodal dimension of the Church.

—For a Synodal Church: *Communion, Participation, Mission*, Final document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2024, §113.

EMBARK: THE MOVEMENT INTO MISSION

Inspired by a love of Jesus, accompanied and supported in the faith, discipleship leads outward to mission.

Jesus called the disciples to be with him, and he also sent them out to preach the Gospel and make other disciples (Matthew 28:16–20). In addition to being an invitation to come, discipleship is a call to go.

Those who have encountered Christ, cannot keep that experience to themselves. His love compels them to share it. Discipleship is incomplete unless it is lived in witness.

To embark is to step into one's calling as a missionary disciple—to live with purpose, to witness to Christ and to participate in the building of God's kingdom.

For young people, this outward dimension is especially compelling. Gen Z is strongly [motivated by purpose and impact](#). They want their lives to matter and are drawn to causes that contribute to the common good. When faith is presented as a lived mission—one that transforms both the individual and the world—it [resonates deeply](#).

Mission is not always dramatic. More often, it is lived in the ordinary rhythm of life:

- in families and friendships
- in schools and workplaces
- in service to those in need
- in everyday acts of love and integrity.

Young people respond powerfully when they are:

- trusted with responsibility
- invited into leadership
- given opportunities to contribute
- empowered to shape the life and mission of the Church.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Where are we creating opportunities for young people to encounter Christ in our parishes and organisations?
2. How could our community create environments that foster the journey in faith of our young people?
3. Looking ahead five years, what three hopes do you have for young people in relation to faith, belonging, engagement and living as missionary disciples? What could the Archdiocese do to realise these hopes?



FURTHER READING

Pope Francis, [*Christus vivit*](#), Post-Synodal Exhortation to Young People and to the Entire People of God, 25 March 2019.

Pope Francis, [*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*](#), Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2024. See especially §§113 and 114.

TO WATCH

[*Become who God made you to be*](#), Pope Leo XIV's video message for pilgrims at the Australian Catholic Youth Festival 2025.

NEXT STEP

Please provide your feedback by scanning the QR code below or visiting:

<https://melbcath.org/synod-youth>

