

**AN OPEN LETTER  
OF THE FILIPINO YOUTH  
TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES**

**To our beloved Cardinals, to our dear Archbishops and Bishops,  
to our Parish Priests, Youth Directors and Directresses,  
to the members of the Clergy,  
to our sisters and brothers in the Consecrated Life,  
to our Parents and Elders,  
to our fellow young Filipinos and Filipinas,  
to our sisters and brothers in Christ,**

### **Introduction**

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior... The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” [Lk 1:46-47, 49]

This is our sentiment—we who gathered on 2018 May 31, Feast of Mary’s Visitation and Encounter with Elizabeth, in St. Paul University of Quezon City, upon the invitation of the Episcopal Commission on Youth (ECY) of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). Youth leaders and youth ministers, clergy and consecrated women and men as well as lay people, through a 3-day process of reflecting and sharing—we drew up a roadmap for the celebration of the Year of the Youth (YOTY) in 2019, following the 2018 celebration of the Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons and continuing the 9-year preparation for the 500th year of evangelization of the Philippines.

Like Mary, we are thankful for this privilege of putting ourselves in the shoes of the Filipino youth to prepare for the Year of the Youth. On behalf of our fellow Filipino youth, like the two disciples of Emmaus, we will tell Jesus, the Son of Mary, our situation, our concerns and our youthful dreams for the Church and for the society. With Jesus and His Mother Mary, who went in haste to help Elizabeth, we encourage our youthful peers to hasten and join in realizing the goals of the Year of the Youth.

## The Goals of the Year of the Youth

### Goal 1: Youth in Formation

An evangelized youth conscious of his/ her giftedness, transformed by a personal encounter with Christ, and growing and maturing through youthful formation and activities.

### Goal 2: Youth in the Community, Church and Society

A family-oriented youth whose image of oneself is patterned after the life of Jesus, and who is actively involved in the life of the Church and society through their vocation, profession and stage in life.

### Goal 3: Youth in Mission

A youth inspired by the church's missionary spirit, who, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, courageously shares Christ's message of joy and hope to people in difficult situations, rekindles the faith of those who drifted from the Church, and promotes dialogue with other faiths.

### Goal 4: Youth Ministry and Youth Ministers

A preferential ministry for the young animated by youth ministers who are filled with the spirit of the new evangelization and equipped with pastoral skills and resources, ably responding to youth issues.

## The Year of the Youth Theme

***Filipino Youth in Mission: Beloved, Gifted, Empowered***

## The Scripture Story to Inspire and Guide us for the Year of the Youth

### The Appearance on the Road to Emmaus

*Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles\* from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and*

*crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see.” And he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

[Lk 24:13-35]

## Journey of Dialogue between the Filipino Youth and Jesus

*[Jesus] asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” [Lk 24:17a]*

We liken ourselves to the two disciples of Emmaus and converse with Jesus about who we are, where we are, and what our concerns and hopes are as we journey in life and walk in faith.

### Some of our Personal Traits

Filipino youth of the 21st century are life-given and want to be life-giving. We are dynamic individuals, overflowing with blessings, willing and open to learn and to grow when provided with opportunities to do so.

We are all searching for our identity—who we are. We search for our meaning and ultimately our purpose in life. We know that we are called for something more than ourselves.

We are called to act, but we still need to be guided and formed. We lack critical thinking and decision-making skills that usually make us hesitant to commit.

We do not see ourselves as “the future”, but as “the present” of the Church, the world, and of society. Hence, we are gifts, life-given to the Church and to the Philippines, and we want to be truly life-giving.

## Our Spiritual Life

Many of us, young people of today, regard ourselves as more spiritual than religious. We acknowledge the presence of God; we believe in Him, and we yearn for Him. We choose to express this longing for a deeper relationship with our Lord and heighten our experience of faith through personal prayer and participation in various prayer gatherings. Our apparent distrust and doubt on the credibility of the Church, on the other hand, is but an expression of our burning desire to see her truly living the joy of the Gospel.

We long for a Church that embodies Christ's vision and dream for her—a Church that:

- has confidence in us<sup>ii</sup>, and ensures that we are “not marginalized but feel accepted”<sup>iii</sup>;
- declares and actualizes her preferential apostolate for us<sup>iv</sup>; and
- “draws the attention of young people by being rooted in Jesus Christ”<sup>v</sup>.

## Our Family

Our family is where we first experience love, care and belongingness. It is also where we have our first role models who guide and shape us as we are prepared to be launched into the bigger environment. Our Filipino culture that influences our family plays a major role in shaping us as young people. Practices and cultural behaviors, such as “*utang na loob*” and “*pagmamano*”, are still very much present in us, as well as the values of respect, obedience, and being family-oriented.

However, there are many different family situations present for each of us. Nowadays, due to the need for financial stability, some parents have to leave their children to seek greener pastures. Through these various situations, we still see the family as a foundational aspect of our lives. In our dreams for a better life, our families will always be part of our hopes and aspirations.

## Our Social Relationships and Communities

We value our relationships as much as our families—at times even more. We want to belong, more than anything. Hence, we seek a community that empowers, encourages, and challenges us. Friends and our social relationships are very important as they are part of the environment that we live in. These people not only journey with us and encourage us, but also form and influence us.

Despite our being hyperconnected with the world, we still feel left out. We still sense that we do not belong. We also do not see enough opportunities to actively participate. Now, more than ever, we are ready to be trusted as partners in shaping our country and our Church.

## Some Socio-cultural Concerns

### *Health*

We acknowledge the need to be healthy. However, in many places, young people do not receive enough nutrition and the needed medical attention. Depression and suicide are prevalent issues being discussed by the young and about the young. Substance abuse, other forms of addiction, and HIV/AIDS also gravely affect our fellow youth. We feel that there is an urgent need to address these concerns as these may involve us and affect the people around us.

### *Education*

We value our education together with our teachers and formators, who teach us majority of what we know, as we spend most of our time in school. Unfortunately, not all Filipino youth are given the opportunity for formal education. Some even end up on the streets or find themselves before high-risk situations such as child labor.

### *Environment*

We dream of a safe and sustainable world to live in. We value Mother Earth and all of God's creation. We understand the importance of caring for our common home, but still need to realize that our seemingly small actions can either have a greatly positive or negative impact.

### *Economic Challenges*

Our national economy is said to be growing at its potential<sup>vi</sup>. However, majority of the Filipino youth do not feel this growth nor understand what it means and yet are very much affected by it. Many of us still experience difficulty in finding stable jobs to keep our future secure; others even fall victim to human trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Most want to make a living not just for ourselves, but more for our parents who have given much for us. We dream of a more inclusive economy that provides equal opportunities to people regardless of age and gender.

### *Politics*

Filipino youth comprise majority of the voters in the country. We seek honest and authentic leaders who stand for truth, justice and integrity. We need credible leaders we can count on and trust to lead and make moral decisions for the good of our country and its people. In the same way, we feel that we too can be leaders ourselves in various ways. Although there are opportunities to be the leaders we seek, we feel that these are limited, and at times even superficial.

### *Dialogue with Cultures*

We are heavily exposed to many kinds of differences: in cultures (e.g. indigenous peoples), faiths (e.g. other faith denominations), and ideologies (e.g. those rooted in same sex attraction). In all these, we heed Pope Francis' invitation to build a "culture of encounter". We seek to further understand them, and a concrete step

is for us to have opportunities for dialogue to face these differences and move towards a more inclusive world.

### **Our Social Circles and the Digital Community**

Regular interaction with our friends is now more of a need than a mere pastime as our elders presume. We value much our peer group relationships or “*barkada*”. During this stage of our lives, we seek to construct an identity of our own, one that may be independent from our family, but defined by the peer group that we belong to.<sup>vii</sup> When we find a sense of connection between our identity and the values that our peer group has, we feel a greater sense of belongingness.<sup>viii</sup>

Unlike before, however, our peer groups today vary from physical groups to digital communities. Most of us live a part of our lives online as technology is already part of our daily life. We are a generation that is very much connected, yet still disconnected. Most of us who are frequently engaged online would rather express ourselves through “*emojis*” or posts on our social media accounts as these appear to be separate from our physical selves. Some of our behaviors now are also influenced by the number of followers we have online, or the number of “likes” that our posts have earned. These online friendships could even bring about different pressures—to be popular, to be “always-on”; these play an integral part in how we form and maintain our relationships both online and offline.

### **Youth Seeking Purpose/ Meaning in Life through Role Models**

Filipino youth will always find meaning in the reality of the family. Dreams of prosperity emerge as we aspire to improve the plight of our families. However, aside from laboring for our parents and families, we also acknowledge our need to be devoted in discerning our vocation.

We feel at times that our purpose and meaning are imposed on us by those in positions of power and authority, whom we often sense as doubtful over the goals we set in life. We yearn for people in authority whom we can look up to as regards integrity and credibility, as well as look to for guidance and accompaniment.

Our hearts are open to see and embrace role models who give witness to the goodness of life while rooted in the family. We want our elders to journey with us, to be approachable and not untouchable, to level with us to a certain extent, to walk the talk, and to make us sense that we are all equal. We are persons capable of contributing in the way others do—with our own skills, knowledge and wisdom.

It is our ultimate hope that as we seek our purpose, we are given much life in order for us to share our lives with and for those around us. We wish to be given more

opportunities to share ourselves: not just with and for our families, but with and for the rest of the community, our country, and the Church.

## Journey of Listening of the Filipino Youth to Jesus

*Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. [Lk 24:27]*

The two disciples not only conversed with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, but also listened to Him as He explained the Scriptures to them. In this roadmap for the Year of the Youth, Jesus, whom we know speaks in various ways, invites us to listen and find enlightenment, the way the two disciples did.

### Through the Scriptures

Jesus declares to us, “As the Father loves me, so I also love you.” [Jn 15:9] Thus, He invites us to remain in His love by following His commandments. Only then will we experience joy that is complete [cf. Jn 15:9-11].

Indeed, Jesus looks at us and loves us. He gives us a challenging proposal: “Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” [Mk 10:21] Following Jesus entails letting go of our possessions for us to give ourselves fully to Him and attain fullness of life.

And Jesus tells us: “Rise, and do not be afraid.” [Mt 17:7b] “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” [Mk 16:15] “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” [Mt 28:20] Jesus sends us to be His missionary disciples, and promises to be with us.

### Through the Church

Jesus expresses His love and affection for us through the Church—a love that is incarnate, preferential and unconditional<sup>ix</sup>. Through the Church, His Body, He is always concerned with us, with all our expectations and hopes<sup>x</sup>, and He reminds us not to be afraid “especially when we are faced with the fundamental choices on which depend who we will be and what we will do in this world”<sup>xi</sup>.

Through Pope Francis, the Church challenges us to be “revolutionaries... to swim against the tide... to rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes [we] are incapable of responsibility, that believes [we] are incapable of true love.”<sup>xii</sup>

The Church in the Philippines puts her confidence in us Filipino youth to raise the social consciousness not only of our peers but also of our elders<sup>xiii</sup>. In his message to the youth for the World Youth Day 1995 in Manila, St. John Paul II told us that

we “are especially called to become missionaries of this New Evangelization, by daily witnessing to the Word that saves.”<sup>xiv</sup>

### Through Mary’s Example

Our Blessed Mother is a model for us, as she herself was called to mission through the Annunciation at a very young age [cf. Lk 1:26-38]. Like her, the Lord continues to call and challenge us. Recently, Pope Francis tells us: “the Lord, the Church, the world are waiting for your answer to the unique call that each one receives in this life!”<sup>xv</sup>

At our young age, our challenges and calling may strongly disturb and overwhelm us, just like Mary [cf. Lk 1:29]. Time and again, we are reminded not to be afraid, for we have found favor with God [cf. Lk 1:30]! May her inspiration allow us to respond with a courageous and committed YES, proclaiming with her: “I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” [cf. Lk 1:38].

As with the two disciples, may these words from Jesus open our eyes to recognize Him [cf. Lk 24:31], and make our hearts burn with joy to share the good news to our fellow Filipino youth [cf. Lk 24:32-33].

### Journey back to Jerusalem, Journey of Witnessing to Jesus by the Filipino Youth

*So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. [Lk 24:33-35]*

Indeed, like the two disciples, we now are filled with excitement to witness to Jesus who listens to our story, speaks to us words of encouragement, and challenges us. We respond to Jesus and witness to Him in the Year of the Youth through the strategic pastoral plan that the Episcopal Commission on Youth proposes at the national and diocesan levels.

### Pastoral Plan for the 2019 Year of the Youth

#### 1. Pre-YOTY Programs and Activities (2018 August-October)

- Creation of the YOTY Logo  
Presentation of proposed logos during the NCYM2018.
- Composition of the YOTY Theme Song

Through a contest; submission will be done during the NCYM2018.

- Identification of YOTY Patron Saints
- Formulation of the YOTY Prayer
- National Conference of Youth Ministers and National Youth Coordinating Council 2018

Presentation of 2019 YOTY: Concept Paper, pastoral plans (e.g. “Mission L<sup>3</sup>”, among others), etc.

- Writing of the CBCP Pastoral Letter on the YOTY

Target launch date: 2018 October 22, memorial of St. John Paul II.

## 2. YOTY Programs and Activities

<i>Month</i>	<i>Day/ Date</i>	<i>Programs and Activities</i>
December	02	1st Sunday of Advent; beginning of a new liturgical year  (at the diocesan level) Launching of the YOTY Information Campaign: YOTY online page and other YOTY social media accounts
	Within the Advent Season	(at the parish level) Family Advent Recollection
	16	National Youth Day 2018  (at the local levels) Celebration of the NYD2018 Simultaneous ringing of the bells at 6:00 PM, invoking Mary, Star of the New Evangelization  (at the national level) Soft launching of the YOTY App National Turnover from 2018 Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons to 2019 Year of the Youth (Icon to be identified)

January	Starting this month until May	Intensified promotion and running of KABATAANG BAYANI
	15	Silver Jubilee of the WYD1995 and 4th Anniversary of Pope Francis' 2015 Visit*  Start of the nationwide pilgrimage of the National Youth Cross and the Relic of St. John Paul II  Launching of YOTY App and its promotion
	31	Memorial of St. John Bosco  Release of Proposed Guidebook for Mass with Young People
February	Starting this month onwards	Intensified promotion and running of Unang Hakbang, particularly for the Diocesan Youth Directors, Coordinators and Leaders and for members of national councils of FNYO-member organizations
March	Between March 06 and April 13	(at the regional levels) YOTY Retreat for Youth Ministers
April	14-21	Holy Week 2019
	23-28	National celebration of National Youth Day 2019, Archdiocese of Cebu  Soft Launch of 3-Year Formation Program: The Road to 500 Years of Christianity
May	Whole month	Youth mobilization in parish-led election activities
	12	(at the diocesan and parish levels) "A Candle for H.O.P.E."
June	Whole month	Youth mobilization in pre-school year initiatives (Brigada Eskwela, summer classes, etc.) Enrollment and start of classes
July		(at the diocesan level) Dialogue between parish youth ministries and campus ministries

August	02-04	Workshop on Incorporating Youth Ministry in Seminary Formation
September	Whole month	Youth Ministers' Exchange Program, Year 1
October	19	End of the nationwide pilgrimage of the National Youth Cross and the Relic of St. John Paul II
November	22	(at the national level) Philippine Catholic Youth Ministry Awards and Closing of the YOTY Information Campaign: "500 Faces of Christianity" Compilation of Best Practices "Mission L <sup>3</sup> " Best Implementer
December	01	(at the diocesan level) Closing of the YOTY

\*Youth Festivals will be an integral part of the Pilgrimage.

### 3. Other Programs and Activities during and beyond the YOTY

- Youth ministry offices (apostolates/ commissions/ organizations) will be encouraged to develop and maintain websites and other forms of presence in social media
- Research on understanding the different youth generations
- National Filipino Catholic Youth Study (NFCYS) 2019

## Conclusion

The Year of the Youth is indeed a journey of encounter with Jesus, accompanied by Mary, the Star of the New Evangelization. In this journey, we tell the story of the Filipino youth with our Risen Lord; we, young Filipinos and Filipinas, listen to Jesus, the Youth Minister par excellence and, as we are blessed and gifted during this journey, we are empowered to witness to and share our faith.

We implore the Holy Spirit to guide us in realizing this pastoral project for us Filipino youth, a large and dynamic portion of the population of the Philippines<sup>xvi</sup>, "known as a 'pueblo amante de Maria'"<sup>xvii</sup>. We entrust the 2019 Year of the Youth to Mary, our Blessed Mother, as we commit ourselves to pray meaningfully every day the Angelus, and personally a "Hail Mary".

*Hail Mary, full of grace!  
The Lord is with you.  
Blessed are you among women  
And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.*

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
Pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death.  
Amen.*

## From the Filipino youth 2019 onwards

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<sup>i</sup> Scripture verses cited in this document are from the New American Bible, revised edition (NABRE).

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 33rd World Youth Day (WYD) 2018, no. 4: "You young people need to know that someone truly believes in you: please know that the Pope has confidence in you, that the Church has confidence in you!"

<sup>iii</sup> "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment": Pre-Synodal Meeting Final Document, no. 5.

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), Acts and Decrees, no. 385.

<sup>v</sup> "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment": Pre-Synodal Meeting Final Document, no. 11.

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. "Philippines Economic Update: Investing in the Future", published 2018 April 16, found in The World Bank, [www.worldbank.org/en/country/philippines/publication/philippines-economic-update-investing-in-the-future](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/philippines/publication/philippines-economic-update-investing-in-the-future), accessed 2018 June 25.

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. Lajom, J.A., Canoy, N, Amarnani, R., Parcon, A.M., & Valera, P. M. (2009). Barkadahan: A study of peer group norms and values among Filipino adolescents. *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, 42 (2), pp. 195-211.

<sup>viii</sup> Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117 (3), pp. 497-529.

<sup>ix</sup> Episcopal Commission on Youth of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, KA-LAKBAY: Directory for Catholic Youth Ministry in the Philippines, p. 37.

<sup>x</sup> Cf. Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI on the occasion of the 25th World Youth Day (WYD) 2010, no. 1.

<sup>xi</sup> Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 33rd World Youth Day (WYD) 2018, no. 1.

<sup>xii</sup> Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 30th World Youth Day (WYD) 2015, no. 2.

<sup>xiii</sup> Cf. Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), Acts and Decrees, no. 384.

<sup>xiv</sup> Message of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II for the IX and X World Youth Day (WYD), no. 3.

<sup>xv</sup> Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 33rd World Youth Day (WYD) 2018, no. 4.

<sup>xvi</sup> Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), Acts and Decrees, art. 50, no. 2.

<sup>xvii</sup> Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. *New National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines (NNCDP) 2007*, no. 204.