

**REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE,
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
“JOURNEYING TOGETHER”, SPONSORED BY THE USCCB SECRETARIAT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, I greet you warmly in the name of Pope Francis, assuring you of his prayers and spiritual closeness, as you gather virtually for the online *Journeying Together* kick-off event. You remain very dear to the Holy Father.

You are living through these incredible times which include the coronavirus pandemic. Like many adults, you were forced to socially distance from one another, and like young people of every age, naturally you miss your friends. Many of you were deprived of graduation ceremonies, proms, sports, and other events, so critical to creating positive memories and bonds of solidarity. Furthermore, with the public suspension of Masses throughout much of the country, you were without access to the sacraments. Many youth events, conferences and camps were cancelled.

Nevertheless, you are resilient. The pandemic forced many people not only to watch Mass online but also to rely on social media and social networks. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (nn.86-90), Pope Francis addresses the question of the digital environment, which is “no longer merely a question of ‘using’ instruments of communication, but of living in a highly digitalized culture that has had a profound impact on ideas of time and space, on our self-understanding, our understanding of others and the world, and our ability to communicate, learn, be informed and enter into relationship with others.” (86)

Young people know how to flourish in this new environment, which has created a “public square”, which provides “an extraordinary opportunity for dialogue, encounter and exchange between persons, as well as access to information and knowledge. Moreover, the digital world is one of social and political engagement and active citizenship, and it can facilitate the circulation of independent information providing effective protection for the most vulnerable and publicizing violations of their rights.” (87)

The digital networks allowed individuals to gather in solidarity and to work for justice following the death of George Floyd. These same networks also allowed young people of faith to exchange ideas and to engage in faith formation and catechesis through Zoom calls and other “digital” conferences during a period when many in-person events were cancelled.

Nevertheless, these virtual gatherings can never replace authentic human relationships and encounters. The Holy Father warns that “like every human reality, it has its share of limitations and deficiencies. It is not healthy to confuse communication with mere virtual contact. Indeed, “the digital environment is also one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, even to the extreme case of the ‘dark web’. Digital media can expose people to the risk of addiction, isolation and gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relationships.” (88)

During the pandemic, the Holy Father stressed the need for real relationships: “Familiarity with the Lord is always communal. Yes, it is intimate, it is personal but in community. A familiarity without community, a familiarity without Bread, a familiarity without the Church, without the people, without the sacraments is dangerous. It can become a familiarity ... for me alone, detached from the People of God. The familiarity of the Apostles with the Lord was always communal, always communal ... The Church, the

sacraments, the People of God are concrete. It is true that at this moment we must make this familiarity with the Lord in this way [through television or internet] but we need to get out of the tunnel, not stay there!" (POPE FRANCIS, HOMILY, 17 APRIL 2020)

Thus, I want to encourage you – young people as well as Youth Ministers – to use the new technologies and media for evangelization – to build a culture of encounter. Indeed, in one way or another, we must all be engaged in the mission of the Church, which is to bring salvation in Christ Jesus to the world, yet the Holy Father identifies the special gifts of young people as missionaries, writing: "Young people can find new fields for mission in the most varied settings. For example, since they are already so familiar with social networks, they should be encouraged to fill them with God, fraternity and commitment." (241)

God. Fraternity. Commitment. Our mission begins with God, who loves you. It continues by sharing this love with our neighbor and building fraternity, and demands commitment, going out of our comfort zone with a true spirit of sacrifice. God. Fraternity. Commitment.

I know you will rise to the occasion. The God who loves you and calls you, also accompanies you, and with God, all things are possible. May God bless you.