News



Youth take pictures of Pope Francis as he arrives for a meeting in Santiago, Chile, Jan. 17. (CNS/Reuters/Alessandro Bianchi)



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Pope Francis said Jan. 17 he decided to have October's upcoming global meeting of Catholic bishops focus on young people because the church needs to listen to youth and learn how to be "challenged, deep down, by her sons and daughters."

In a meeting with thousands of Chilean youth outside Santiago's Basilica of Our Lady of Carmen, the pope told them he wants the Oct. 3-28 Synod of Bishops to hear directly from young people and not others claiming to speak for them.

"I am afraid of filters, because sometimes young people's opinions can arrive in Rome very filtered," the pope quipped in a 20-minute speech that weaved off-the-cuff remarks into his prepared text.

Amid a gusting wind and cheers from young people pressed against fences on the open field in front of the Basilica, Francis said that in his years as a bishop he has "come to see how many, many good ideas there are in young people, in their minds and hearts."

"Realizing how important young people and their experiences are, this year I wanted to call the Synod ... so that you can feel — and really be — protagonists in the heart of the church," he said.

The pope spoke to young people Jan. 17 towards the end of his second of three days in Chile, where earlier in the day he had traveled to the country's southern Araucanía region and exhorted indigenous people there to shun bloodshed in their decades-long struggle with the country's government.

Chilean Ariel Rojas told Francis that she and the other youths wanted to tell him "that there is a country, long and narrow, with a diversity of people and climates, that will not abandon you, and that will be your support when you feel exhausted by your infinite tasks."

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A Synod is a worldwide meeting of Catholic bishops held at the Vatican. The Synod system was first created by Pope Paul VI following the landmark 1962-65 Second Vatican Council, as a way of keeping the Council’s atmosphere of discussion among church prelates alive.

Francis has held two Synods during his papacy, in 2014 and 2015, which both focused on issues of family life and resulted in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* ("The Joy of Love") in 2016.

To prepare for the 2018 gathering, the Vatican office for the Synod has announced it will host a meeting in Rome with young people March 19-24. The office had previously asked youth from around the world to take a survey about their lives and the challenges they face.

Francis told the Chileans Jan. 17 that he wants the October event, which will carry the theme "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment," to listen not only to Catholic youths, but also to young people of every and no religion.

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This story appears in the **Francis in Chile and Peru** feature series. View the full series.