Vatican

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Even in far-off Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, a bishop said a young person asked him what the church is doing to prevent clerical sexual abuse.

"You would think in our isolation we would not hear about this topic," said Bishop Paul Donoghue of Rarotonga, who described his diocese as one of the "dots in the Pacific Ocean. Many dots."

The young people in his diocese watch the news and read it on the internet, he said, and they are "under pressure from their peers on this topic."

"They need credible answers as they are deeply shamed and are uncomfortable associating with such a church," he told the synod Oct. 10. "The youth are asking us church leaders to be transparent and for our church to be up to date. It is my dream that this synod will give the youth both of these."

Bishop Mark O'Toole of Plymouth, England, made a similar point Oct. 11, telling the synod, "credibility and authenticity are crucial."

"The cases of historic abuse within the church, recorded in so many parts of the world, are a counter sign," he said. "Young people rightly expect that we put victim survivors at the center of what we do."

O'Toole said bishops "must be subject to processes as robust as those we would expect for our priests" and that it is essential to involve laypeople, and especially women, in the process of reviewing allegations and instituting safeguarding programs.

"In God's holy people, we find all we need to help heal the wounds of this present crisis," he said. "Mothers, including consecrated women who are spiritual mothers among us, can help us to be tender and loving to the young, whilst also protecting the little ones from the wolves, and so ridding the church of this evil."

Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh, Northern Ireland, whose church has faced its own turmoil because of abuse, told synod members he is "convinced that the Spirit is already actively at work preparing us for a new springtime of growth and abundance in faith."

But, he said, the synod's working document does not seem to share that conviction.

The document, the archbishop told the synod Oct. 10, "lacks the punch and fire that the Spirit brings," not to mention the fact that "baptism is only mentioned three times in the entire document and confirmation is not mentioned at all."

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Martin said he sees many signs that young Catholics are open to the work of the Holy Spirit, including the countless hours many of them spent trying to defeat the recent Irish referendum to legalize abortion.

"Every day I pray for vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life," he said. "But I also pray that all our young lay faithful will find 'new life in the Spirit' and realize more and more that they are called personally by baptism and confirmation to be part of the 'new springtime' for the faith."

The baptismal call to holiness as the one vocation all Christians share has been a recurring theme at the synod.

Archbishop Mario Delpini of Milan told the synod Oct. 11, "by 'vocation' one should understand precisely the choice God made before the creation of the world calling men and women to be saints, to be his children and co-heirs with Jesus of the glory of the Father."

Then, he said, "the choice of a state of life" — whether marriage, the single life, priesthood or religious life — "is the result of the freedom of each person in the context of his or her life." That choice, he said, relies on multiple factors, including individual preferences and talents, the influence of parents and communities and, especially "prayer and the desire to make one's life a gift."

Bishop Lucas Van Looy of Ghent, Belgium, told the synod Oct. 11 that recognizing the role of the community, when the time comes to decide whether or not to ordain a young man to the priesthood, "not only the opinion of the professors in the seminary or the superiors is important, (but) also the parish priest, the catechists, the cook, the men and women who serve the community should be heard."

Regarding the synod's discussion of "accompaniment" or "spiritual mentoring," the bishop insisted that that is a shared responsibility and means knowing a young person and his or her daily life.

"How could the shepherd get the smell of the sheep if he is not constantly present among them," the bishop asked, "and how could the sheep get the smell of the shepherd if he only shows up in the parlor?"

This story appears in the **Synod on the Youth 2018** feature series. View the full series.