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A young man with brown hair wearing a suit smiles at Pope Francis as he signs a document

Pope Francis signs a note asking that U.S. synod delegate Wyatt Olivas, an undergraduate at the University of Wyoming and youngest member of the synod assembly, be excused from classes in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall Oct. 25, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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The youngest member of the synod assembly is confident that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Synod of Bishops, but to get out of class he looked for a little extra help

from the pope.

Wyatt Olivas, 19, is an undergraduate at the University of Wyoming, and for a month he has been seated with cardinals, lay Catholic leaders, bishops and religious to discuss the future of the Catholic Church.

Although he had met Pope Francis early in the synod, he went up to the pope again Oct. 25 and asked him to sign a letter to excuse him from classes for a few days after the assembly ends Oct. 29.

Although Olivas told his professors he would return to class Nov. 1, just two days after the synod's closing Mass, he said that the synod's long schedule had left him drained, and that he wanted a few more days to recover before returning to school.

So, he thought, "what if the pope signed something, I think that would be really funny and I think it would kind of help me out a little bit too," he told Catholic News Service Oct. 26.

Olivas said when it was his turn to greet Francis, "I thanked him for inviting me and inviting young people." And then he told the pope: "I have some classes I have to get to and I don't know if I'm going to make it. Do you want to sign this letter?"

"He's reading it and he just starts laughing," Olivas said. "So he starts writing, in little letters he writes 'Francis.' "

The note says that Olivas "has been an integral part of the Synod on Synodality, working diligently to contribute to this significant event in the church."

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"As a result of his tireless efforts, we believe Wyatt deserves a break from his classes to recharge and rejuvenate," it said. "During his time working on the Synod, Wyatt has been a vital member of our community, displaying a deep commitment to the Church and its values. We recognize the importance of his contributions and would like to extend our gratitude by allowing him some time off from his academic responsibilities."

The note specified that Olivas "pinky promised to return to his classes and complete his work."

He said that the letter was mostly intended to be funny and bring some levity to the synod, where participants had been hard at work for nearly a month.

Asked whether the note will work to get him out of class for a few days, Olivas said, "I sure hope so."

According to the University of Wyoming's excused absence policy, the observance of a religious holy day qualifies as an authorized absence, but pre-planned non-university activities do not.

After getting the note signed, Olivas gave the pope what looks like a white business card with two words printed on it in block lettering: "You Matter."

"I started this tradition in high school," he said. "I think sometimes you forget the pope's human too, right? So, I wanted to give him a note as well, saying 'You matter too.' "

Olivas told CNS that despite being 19, synod members are taking him seriously. "I think that's important in our whole church, to take the young people seriously," he said. "We're here, we want responsibility."

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