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Pope Francis hears confession of a youth April 23, 2016, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano/Reuters)



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Amid widespread uncertainty and social fragmentation, Pope Francis urged young people to embrace their vocation as "pilgrims of hope," offering their lives generously in service to others and as a response to God's love.

Every vocation in the church — to ordained ministry, consecrated life or life as a layperson — "is a sign of God's hope for the world and for each of his children," the pope wrote in his message for World Day of Prayer for Vocations to be observed May 11.

"A vocation is a precious gift that God sows in the heart," the pope wrote. "It is a call to go out of ourselves and begin a journey of love and service."

The Vatican released the pope's message, titled "Pilgrims of Hope: The Gift of Life," March 19, the feast of St. Joseph. Francis said the theme reflects the need for Christians, especially youth, to live their faith courageously amid economic, social and spiritual challenges.

"In our time, many young people feel lost about the future," he wrote. "They often experience uncertainty about job prospects and, more profoundly, an identity crisis, which is also a crisis of meaning and values."

Francis said these struggles are often worsened by the "confusion" of digital culture and the violence of war and injustice; yet God remains present, calling each person by name and inviting them to live with purpose.

The pope also urged adult members of the church, especially pastors, to accompany young people in discerning their vocation.

"We are called to welcome, discern and accompany the vocational journey of new generations," he said, adding that youth must be "co-protagonists with the Holy Spirit, who stirs in them the desire to make their lives a gift of love."

Discerning one's vocation, however, is not an isolated process but takes place within the Christian community, through prayer, reflection and service, he said, encouraging young people to seek silence and space for contemplation in order to listen to God's call.

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"The world pushes you to make hurried decisions and fills your days with noise," he wrote. "Have the courage to stop, to listen within, and to ask God what he dreams for you."

Reflecting on the lives of young saints, including St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Dominic Savio, and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, Francis said their lives show how a vocation is not about self-affirmation but about love and service to others. Blessed Frassati was set to be canonized August 3, 2025, during the Jubilee of Young People.

"Many young people are seeking to know the path that God is calling them to take," he said. "Some discover — often with surprise — a vocation to (the) priesthood or consecrated life; others discover the beauty of the call to marriage and family life or to public service and the witness of faith among colleagues and friends."

Vocations, he added, must be lived with hope and trust in God's providence. "Hope in God does not disappoint," he said. "The world needs young people who are pilgrims of hope, courageous in dedicating their lives to Christ and joyful in being his missionary disciples."

The pope also called for continued prayer and support for vocations within the church.

"The church is alive and fruitful when it generates new vocations," he said. "And the world, often without realizing it, seeks witnesses of hope who proclaim with their

lives that following Christ is a source of joy."

The World Day of Prayer for Vocations is observed annually on the fourth Sunday of Easter, also known as Good Shepherd Sunday, and it invites the global church to pray for and support those discerning a call to serve God and others.