

PASTORAL LETTER

**YEAR OF YOUTH – 2019
DIOCESE OF BADULLA**

My dear Young People, Priests and Religious, Brothers and Sisters,

We make a preferential option for the young in this Year of Youth in the diocese of Badulla under the theme: **“Youth, you are the moon that reflects Jesus, the Sun”**.

Joy is one of the characteristics of the young people. Normal young people celebrate life and express it in song and dance. Generally all young people live in **hope** and are found to prepare in various degrees to live their “tomorrow”.

There are those who have high aspirations and through sacrifice and disciplinary lives make great strides and achieve their goals. There are others who because of lack of opportunity and handicaps are unable to achieve their goals and settle down to lesser purposeful careers. There are also others who for no reason of their own are deprived of what would have been theirs in life. That there are others who are misled, abused, exploited, oppressed and underprivileged in society cannot be denied. Some of the life situations and circumstances lead young people to frustrations, addictions and violence, even to suicide. But a good majority are resilient, **guided and well formed psychologically and spiritually to meet challenges** and sufferings in life. They hope and believe in changing the society inspired by the **Word of God**, supported by prayer, family life, community life and life-giving relationships.

We need to help the young people to devote their youthful energies to the establishment of peace and harmony through reconciliation where it is needed and through promoting justice where it is necessary, to uplift the society. This is achievable only by trusting and hoping in the inherent goodness found in their fellow human beings and therefore, never through improper or violent means. In achieving these **Jesus** alone is the supreme example for the youth to follow: **His life, His teaching** and **His mission** as given in the **Word of God** especially in the four Gospels and the writings of His disciples. There are those who, down through the centuries borne witness to Him, now become saints.

While young people are responsible for their own formation, adults too have a stake in their **formation and character building**. The **value system** found in the society has little room for Christ, His ways and teaching. The young man who came to Jesus seeking an answer to know “what he still lacked in life” did not have the courage **to respond generously and joyfully to Jesus’ invitation**. What a sad departure! (Cf. Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10: 17-31; Lk. 18: 18-30). He failed to recognize the love Jesus showed him (Mk. 10:21).

What purposes and goals in life are set before the young people who are pulled in various directions today? The materialist world has much to offer the young but the Lord Jesus Christ has much more, and lasting joy to offer. It is important, therefore, to discover the hidden treasure and buy the pearl of great price (Cf. Mt. 13: 44-45 & Mr. 6: 19-21) **guided by the Word of God during this Year of Youth**. In this regard the Priests have a pastoral obligation to rally round the young people while the Religious have a collaborative role to play. Let us give space for creativity and initiative which are hall marks of the youth in their search and expression as they respond to the Word of God.

The other young man referred to by Jesus is in the parable of the Prodigal son (Lk. 15: 11-20). He wants to leave the warmth of his home and his family to enjoy his freedom to do what he pleases and follow his passions. Jesus shows what happens when one seeks **moral autonomy** rejecting wise counsel be it teaching of the Church and wisdom of the sages. It leads only to helplessness, loneliness and rejection by the very people who cling to you like leaches. Only one is left on earth and in heaven to welcome you, your father heavenly whose love never fails.

Pope Francis at the Synod of Bishops on “Youth” (October 2018) exhorted all concerned, the parents, teachers, adults, Clergy and Religious to listen to the young people as “all young people need to be heard first and then guided to enter more deeply into themselves.

We need to recognize in the young people their abilities and talents, their willingness to sacrifice and give themselves to a worthy cause and meaningful, joyful living. **St. John the beloved disciple of Jesus** affirms twice the strengths of discipleship found in young people “I am writing to you young men who have already overcome the evil one... and God’s word has made its home in you and you have overcome the “Evil One” (1 Jhn 2: 13-14).

Pope John Paul II, now a Saint who began the **World Day of Youth** encouraged the youth saying: “Peace and youth go together. The future is in the hands of the young; it depends on the fundamental options they make and the essential values they embody in their lives. Do not be afraid of your own youth! (International Youth Year 1985).

The world is replete with all kinds of attractive programmes for the youth exploiting their sensitivities, vulnerability and hungers. The abused social media has also already shown its negative effects on the youth. Unwittingly some of the young people fall prey to these because of their presentation. The Church however, calls the youth to participate in life-giving, meaningful programmes and activities at Parish, Deanery and Diocesan levels. Youth Way of the Cross, Prayer and Days of Recollection, Youth Rally, Residential Programmes, Youth camps, Cultural activities, Blood donation, Volunteer service to the needy, Competitions, Activities of the Youth Federation, Youth counseling will be some of the important ones that will enrich the young people.

To you, young people who love freedom let me remind you where and in whom you will find true freedom in the words of Jesus: **“If the Son frees you, you will really be free”** (Jhn. 8:36). Finally let me repeat the request of Our Blessed mother, the mother of Christ “Do whatever he tells you (John 2:5). God loves you.

I wish you God’s blessings.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ J. Winston S. Fernando, S.S.S.
Bishop of Badulla

Given on the Solemnity of the Mother of God, 01st January 2019 at Bishop’s House, Badulla.