CHRISTUS VIVIT
(CHRIST IS ALIVE)

By Fr. Matthew P. Schneider, LC
SUMMARY
Apostolic exhortations, like Christus Vivit is, are generally letters to the whole world on a specific theme. In this case, the difference is not so much the theme but the audience. It is addressed primarily to young people.

The letter is structured into nine chapters. The first two chapters provide a kind of Scriptural background, talking about the two testaments, then Jesus and the saints. The third provides an analysis of the situation young people find themselves in. The fourth is probably the most important chapter: it is a presentation of basic Christian truths in a format accessible to young people. The fifth chapter talks about the various experiences young people have today. Chapter six brings back the value of listening to elders and being rooting in culture rather than being unrooted and homogenous. The seventh is the longest chapter, dealing with many practical details about youth ministry. The last two chapters talk about the vocation with chapter eight focusing on different vocations while chapter nine focusing on discerning a vocation.

Each section of this document is good and coherent in itself. The document itself tries to cover a wide swath of all aspects affecting young people, so one part may not relate super-well to another. This is inevitable in such a wide-reaching document.

Note: In this document as in many Church documents translated from other European languages, “youth” or “young people” refer to a slightly older age than in everyday American English. World Youth Day has an age limit of 16 to 35 and that is approximately the age the Pope is referring to in this document.

CATEGORIES OF INTEREST
Young People, Youth Ministry, Youth, Holiness, Kerygma, Young Adults, College, High School, Young Professionals, Vocation, Intergenerational Ministry

TIMEFRAME
Young People, Youth Ministry, Youth, Holiness, Kerygma, Young Adults, College, High School, Young Professionals, Vocation, Intergenerational Ministry

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF SESSIONS
If doing it as a small group, I’d recommend 9 sessions: 1 for each chapter, covering the intro and summary in the first and last session respectively.

MATERIALS NEEDED
Everyone will need this study guide and a copy of the Essay:
- Free webpage of Christus Vivit
- Free pdf of Christus Vivit
- Buy USCCB print edition of Christus Vivit
- Buy OSV print edition of Christus Vivit
- Buy WAU print edition of Christus Vivit

It would also be helpful to keep a copy of The Catechism of the Catholic Church and The Bible at hand.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?
Anyone can participate because the Pope addresses the document to all people. However, given the theme, this is more suited for youth, or those who work with youth (whether youth ministers or parents). In general, homogenous groups work better so high schoolers, college students, parents and youth ministry volunteers might want to do it separately if numbers are sufficient.

STRUCTURE
Each chapter / session begins with an introduction to the material followed by questions. The questions can be divided two ways. First, some questions are more about comprehension while others are for reflection on what Francis said, and often both are mixed. Questions have no label distinguishing comprehension or reflection. Second, 11 out of 107 questions are labelled “optional” as they don’t cover key points of the document but are helpful for someone who wants to be thorough. The consideration before the questions in each chapter is a kind of summary: you can read it before reading the chapter and/or as a reminder of what you previously read when begining a group discussion.

The questions here are meant to help you understand and reflect on the text, and to apply the text to your life and the lives of those around you. Paragraph numbers are after each question, so you can look it up if you are uncertain about anything. I have tried to make questions so that any group can start a discussion. Feel no obligation to answer every question but try to have a good discussion about growing as youth or helping youth grow in holiness.
HOW MUCH HOMEWORK?

If you are using this in a small group, between the sessions, each individual should read the text of Christus Vivit. The division into multiple sessions means that the average session has about 5 letter-sized pages of reading each time. The introductions and notes in this guide are only meant to give you a bit of a theme before jumping in and to help you understand.

PERSONAL STUDY

You can also use this guide for personal study and reflection. Simply read the chapters and their summaries and questions together then reflect on the questions yourself. Hopefully, this guide helps you better understand what Francis says to help youth follow Jesus.

NOTES
INTRO & CHAPTER 1

What Does the Word of God Have to Say About Young People?

CONSIDERATIONS

Pope Francis begins wanting to make two key points in the introduction. First, he wants to point all to Christ, our hope. He says, “Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!” (1) Second, he wants to point out that this was fruit of the synod and written as a letter to and for young people, not a kind of theoretical discussion on youth.

The first Chapter goes straight to Sacred Scripture. Francis takes eight Old Testament examples of young people pushing along salvation history. In the New Testament, he finds both Jesus’ message to youth and more examples of holy young people.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Introduction

1. What basic message does Francis begin with? What does he say about Jesus in our lives? Why? (1–2)
2. Who does he set out as his primary audience? How did this document come about? (3–4)

Chapter 1: Old Testament

1. Who are the eight Old Testament examples the Pope uses? Do any of them stand out for you? (5–11)
2. How were Samuel and David called? Were they called on their own in isolation? (8–9)
3. Optional: How does Catholicism share holiness with other Christian traditions? (9)

Chapter 1: New Testament

1. What lesson does Pope Francis draw out of the parable of the prodigal son? Do I still have a young heart or has my heart already “grown old”? (12)
2. What does Francis mean by, “True youth means having a heart capable of loving”? What can I draw from that? (13)
3. What kind of relationship does Jesus envision between the young and the old? How does Jesus speak of the three dimensions of equality, brotherhood, and respect? How do I live these three dimensions? (14–16)

4. Pope Francis speaks of two people – one in Mark and the other in Matthew – who came to Jesus asking about moral teaching. What is the difference between the two? What lessons can we learn from them? Which aspects of the two should we imitate and which should we avoid? (17–18)

5. What example do the wise young woman give while Jesus is in the tomb? How can we relate this to our lives? (19)

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CHAPTER 2

Jesus, Ever Young

CONSIDERATIONS

In the second chapter, Francis takes the lessons from Scripture in chapter one and moves on to reflect on the youth of Jesus and Mary as an example for all youth in the Church. He begins with what we know about Jesus youth from the Gospel and from tradition. He takes this to talk about young people in the Church and the young Church. This chapter concludes with examples of young holiness: Mary and then a dozen saints.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The opening paragraph talks about how Jesus is young. When Jesus is eternal and lived his incarnate life 2000 years ago, why do we talk about him as young? (22)
2. (Optional) What are some key events of Jesus’ youth? How was his baptism different from ours? (23–25)
3. What does Pope Francis draw out of the finding in the temple and the two short descriptions of his youth on either side of it? What dimensions did he grow in? How can we refer to this time as training? (26–27)
4. Was Jesus an isolated youth or was he part of the larger community? Did Mary and Joseph stifle him? What kind of friend would he have been as a youth? How can I be more like him as a friend to others? (28–29)
5. What lessons does Pope Francis suggest we draw from Jesus’ youth? Does he suggest youth do most things alone or with the wider community? (30)
6. Why is it important to see that Jesus teaches from within the youth of young people? What can Jesus’ youthfulness teach the world? (31–32)
7. Is youth a period of time or a mindset? How can we refer to the Church as young? Why do these two things matter? How can young people keep the Church young? How can we live them out better as a Church? (34–37)
8. (Optional) What kind of fraternity does Francis propose between the young and the old? What should the result be? (38)
9. Pope Francis explains the difficulty the Church has communicating to many young people, then suggests we need to listen more. Why does he say this? How can we better live this in our circumstances? (39–42)
10. Why does the Pope say, “[Mary] is the supreme model for a youthful Church”? What examples from her youth can we imitate? (43–44, 46)
11. As Mary got older, she accompanied Jesus to the cross. What can that teach young people today? (45)
12. Is Mary close to us today? How does Francis indicate she is concerned for us? (48)
13. What do young saints provide for the whole Church? (49–50)
14. Who are the dozen saints and blessed that Pope Francis mentions? Which ones inspire me most? What can I learn from these holy people? (51–62)

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CHAPTER 3

You Are the “Now” of God

CONSIDERATIONS

After putting forward the scriptural and spiritual foundation in the first two chapters, Pope Francis dedicates this chapter to discussing where young people are. Much of this is dedicated to specific struggles they are having (As this guide is designed for those in Canada and the USA, I will skip some issues, which are uncommon in these countries). This chapter might seem overly negative on first reading; however, we need to understand Francis’s intention: he wants to point out how tough and difficult life is today for many young people, in order to point out what the Church is responding to and who Jesus is an answer for. It is, in a way, the listening that Pope Francis often promotes.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are young people just the future? What does the Church see in them? (64)
2. What does the Pope suggest instead of prepackaged answers? How often do I use such answers? (65)
3. Should we look mainly at young people’s difficulties or troubles? Or should we appreciate their good points and look with hope? (66–67)
4. (Optional) What does Pope Francis mention about the world demographics of young people? (68–70)
5. Is youth something abstract? How should we analyze it? How might this analysis change our approach? (71)
6. (Optional) What aspects of living in a world crisis does Francis mention for young people? Which do people I know face? (72–80)
7. Do the sufferings of other young people hurt my heart? Do I weep for them? What motivates this weeping? (76–77)
8. Do I have a good relationship with my parents? Do I learn from them and respect them? What could we do to improve this relationship? (80)
9. What kind of moral questions do I struggle with? How can the Church help? What do I want to learn from her regarding sexuality? (81–82)
10. (Optional) How is my longing for God expressed? Do I know people who express their longing for God in ways that don’t mention God? (84)
11. How do I live in the digital environment? What good or bad can I see in it? How do I communicate through it? Am I aware of dangers like loneliness and being manipulated? How do I protect myself from these dangers? (86–90)
12. (Optional) Have I migrated countries in my life or do I know people who have? What was the experience like? Has there been a cultural uprooting? How can the Church helping people in such situations? (91–94)
13. Have I or someone I known suffered abuse? Sexual or physical abuse? Was this abuse within the Church? If I have no direct experience, do I realize how widespread abuse is? How can I respond? (95–102)
14. How many priests really committed abuse? Do I realize it is a smaller percentage than the general male population? What has been my own response to the clerical abuse Crisis? What more can I and the Church do going forward? (95–102)
15. How does Venerable Carlo Acutis offer a way out? How does he show holiness in the contemporary world? How is it that so many are photocopies like he said? How can we escape this? (Note: although not mentioned in Christus Vivit, Carlo’s most famous work cataloguing Eucharistic Miracles is still available online www.miracolieucaristici.org.)

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CHAPTER 4

A Great Message For All Young People

CONSIDERATIONS

This is a central chapter to this whole document. The Pope presents a Kerygmatic message about the basics of salvation in a way that is specifically adapted to young people. He wants to tell young people about the great message of God’s love. He structures this on three truths: God’s love, Jesus salvation and Jesus’ continued life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the three truths Pope Francis structures this chapter around? Have you heard them? What did you learn from them? (111–29, specifically 112, 118 and 124)

2. How does God’s love relate to familial love? Is God’s love fatherly, motherly or both? (113–114)

3. What other characteristics of God’s love does the Pope focus on? How does God remember us? Does he overwhelm us? Does he accept our struggles? (115–117)

4. How does Jesus accompany us today? Does it affect our day-to-day lives with our problems, frailties and flaws? (119–120)

5. Is salvation valuable? Can we buy it? Does Jesus value us? (122–123)

6. Is Jesus just a nice model from 2000 years ago? Or does he fill us with grace today? Is he present in our lives today? (124–126)

7. Is Jesus a friend? Does he show goodness has the upper hand? What power does his resurrection have? How can knowing he lives now lead us to a relationship or encounter with him? (126–129)

8. What role does the Holy Spirit have in these three truths? What does he give or take away? How is he the “source of youth at its best”? (130–133)

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CHAPTER 5

Paths of Youth

CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter is about living youth with Jesus. It talks about the various experiences of youth – a time of decision, a time of energy, a time of hope and expectation, a time thirsting for new experiences, a time of fraternity, and a time of growth – and speaks of how Jesus can enter into it. In the center of the chapter comes a key section on living friendship with Jesus as a young person.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How is our youth a gift of God? (134–135)
2. How is youth a time of decision and development? How was it in Jesus’ time and how does that compare to today? (136–137)
3. How should God’s love affect our decisions? How does God’s love drive out fear? Do I fear definitive choices? What decisions do I need to make soon? How will God’s love affect those decisions? (138–140)
4. How do we fight the temptation to give up? How can we deal with normal levels of anxiety? Why shouldn’t we sit back and watch life from an armchair? (141–143)
5. Does Jesus want us to have a boring and unfulfilling life? Does Jesus want us to enjoy the small pleasures? Does God want us to enjoy the present? What should our reaction be to all these good experiences that come to us? (144–147)
6. Is God present in our difficulties? How can Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan show us how to find God in difficulties? (148–149)
7. How do those with disabilities experience the world differently? How can we reach out to help them? (149)
8. How is Jesus my best friend? Do I encounter him every day as Pope Francis suggests? (150)
9. Is friendship with others a gift from God? How do they show us God’s love? Who is my best friend who reflects God’s love to me? Am I good, long-term friend? (151–152)
10. When and how did Jesus call himself our friend? How can we see his love as part of his friendship with us? How lasting is his friendship with us? Can we share our secrets with him like with our bestest friend? (153–155)
11. Is Jesus only present when we pray? How can we live with him always? What does he dream for me as his friend? (156–157)
12. How much time and effort do I dedicate to growing physically or mentally? How does that compare with time spent growing spiritually? Do I spontaneously seek Jesus? (158–159)
13. (Optional) How can we transfer the virtues of youth into our older years? How can we stay spiritually young? (160–162)
14. How can we be close to others in fraternity? How does the Holy Spirit want us to come out of ourselves? What is the danger of withdrawing? How can we share our joy with each other? (163–167)
15. Is the lay vocation fulfilled by just serving in the church? How are lay people called to build society? Can lay people fulfill their mission by simply withdrawing into small groups? (168–169)
16. What are some examples the Pope gives for how young people serve? What acts of charity does he mention? Do I do any of these? How can I build a better world? (170–174)
17. How can we witness to the Gospel? What does it mean to "be light"? Are witness and preaching mutually exclusive? (175–176)
18. Where might Jesus send us? Francis talks about the fringes or peripheries of society: where might I find those near my own home? What aspects of the Gospel challenge me personally? (177–178)

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CHAPTER 6

Young People with Roots

CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter wants to remind young people that they don’t live abstracted from the rest of the world. Instead, every young person lives in connection with his culture and the older people around him or her. Culture may promote a certain homogeneity and a certain cult of youth, but these are not the best way for young people to truly live.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What analogy does the Pope begin this chapter with? How can we apply it to our lives? (179)

2. What are the dangers Pope Francis points out about rejecting the wisdom of elders? What is the cult of youth? Why is it seen as a problem? What does the pope mean by confusing “beauty with appearances? What examples of beauty does he give? Can I identify people I know who are beautiful in these ways? (181–183)

3. When the Pope talks about a “spirituality without God,” what else is lacking from such a spirituality? (184)

4. (Optional) Why is cultural colonialization an issue? Are we supposed to be homogenous or rooted in our background? Do I see this in my surroundings? (185–186)

5. Are focusing on the future and paying attention to the past opposed? How can these two work together? What can we learn from the elderly? Do we have to agree with all they say? How does union between generations help? Who do I know who’s older who can teach me valuable lessons? Do I listen? (187–191)

6. Who should listen to the Holy Spirit (young or old)? How can we dream? How do others dream about us? What is the ultimate dream? How can old people teach? How can I learn more from the older generations? (If older, how can I better transmit lessons to the younger generations?) (192–197)

7. If we love, does that mean we will never make a mistake? What is the relationship between love and risk? Are roots or the past related to risks for the future? How? What risks of love should I make looking forward? (198–200)
CHAPTER 7
Youth Ministry

CONSIDERATIONS
This chapter addresses what most people think about most when they think of youth and the Church: youth ministry. The Pope wants to offer some general reflections not offer a single program. He thinks there are many good programs in the Church that should work in harmony. As far as principles, Francis wants to point out: (1) that young people are agents, (2) that we should work together, (3) that we need both outreach and personal growth, (4) that we need to be “rooted” in our culture and family, (5) that we need to reach out to where youth are, (6) that we need to develop and form leaders among the youth, (7) that youth are missionaries, and (8) that we older people have a duty to properly accompany them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION
1. How do young people fall outside usual programs? What has happened with groups and movements regarding young people? How should such groups and parishes work together? (202, if you have more questions, there is a recent Vatican document that goes more in depth on this called Iuvenescit Ecclesia.)

2. How can young people be agents of youth ministry? How can I be an agent of youth ministry? What talents do I have to offer? (203–204)

3. What does Pope Francis think of labels like “conservative” and “liberal”? How have I seen them divide the Church? What do different perspectives have to offer? (205)

4. What does the Pope mean by journeying together? How can we learn from each other? (206–207)

5. What are the two main courses of action Pope Francis mentions? How do they interact? (208–215)

6. Outreach. Francis suggests creating appealing ways for youth to come together: how can we make this happen in our concrete circumstances? How does Pope Francis suggest we use language in such outreach? (210–211)

7. Growth refers to personal growth of each not numbers. How do we follow up after people experience Jesus? How can we improve this? Do we focus on the kerygma or skip it? What kinds of human, spiritual, intellectual and apostolic formation do we offer other youths? (212–215)

8. Pope Francis suggests we often feel orphaned yet the Church can be a family. When have you felt orphaned? How has the Church been a family for you? How can the Church better develop as a family or in friendship? (216–220)

9. (Optional: for those in Catholic schools) How can the school be a place of ministry and evangelization? How should we avoid the bunker mentality Pope Francis warns us of? (221–222)

10. How are spiritual and cultural formation connected? Is study just to get a good job? Why does it matter to ask questions? (223)

11. What areas does Francis list as key for youth ministry? When talking about prayer, he mentions adoration and contemplation: what are my experiences of these? How would I describe it? How can we serve better? Why are sports and music important fields of evangelization? (224–227)

12. Where can we always see God? How can we see him in nature, in the Eucharist, in the other sacraments, etc.? (228–229)

13. When we think of “popular” youth ministry, we often think of big flashy events, but the Pope focuses more on forming Christian leaders. What kinds of leaders is he speaking about? Are we just seeking human qualities or something from the Holy Spirit? (230–232)

14. Francis criticizes reductive moralistic rules but wants responsibilities in their place: what is the difference? Hint: rules are in a book, responsibilities are to another person. (233)

15. How can we better include others in youth ministry? What about questioners or non-believers? Do we just help those fully accepting every line of the Catechism? (234–235)

16. (Optional) What does the pope get out of the story of the disciples at Emmaus? (236–238)
17. How does Pope Francis see young people being missionaries? Have I ever shared the faith in the ways he describes? How can I share the faith online? (239–241)

18. Why is the family the first place of accompaniment for young people? What should we each learn there? How does the community help? (242–244)

19. How should we accompany those with leadership potential? How do we identify that potential? Am I a leader? Can I be one? If I am one, who can a mentor to become a leader? (245–247)
CHAPTER 8

Vocation

CONSIDERATIONS

The final two chapters of this document deal with the idea of a vocation. This chapter pursues a wide swath of different vocations, while the last chapter deals with how young people can discern a vocation. Francis takes vocation both in a wide sense of friendship with God and in a narrower sense of a specific vocation such as marriage, a career, and priesthood or consecrated life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How is a vocation the whole life of friendship with God and the Christian call to holiness? Do I live this aspect of vocation well? How can I grow and mature in friendship and love? (248–249)

2. Why is friendship with Jesus the basis of discernment? How does God look on us with love? Is accepting him automatic? How is Jesus part of my “life history and life story”? (250–252)

3. When Francis talks of vocation in the strict sense, he calls it, “A Call to missionary service”: What is meant by this? How can I apply this to my life? Is my life an offering? Can a vocation be reduced to the work you do? Is there any part of life Jesus doesn’t value? (253–256)

4. How is a vocation “finding our true selves”? How can I be more my true self? What ways can I “be there for others”? (257–258)

5. Marriage with the right person is a “call to love.” What is meant by that? How can a couple live out that call? How can they invite Jesus in? How can we express true love in our sexuality? Can I look forward to being a parent? (259–262)

6. (Optional, based mainly on how much you think your group is willing to share) What challenges do people I know have in their family of origin that might negatively affect their future family? How does the culture of the ephemeral negatively affect marriage? How am I preparing for marriage? (Or, if married, developing a better understanding of this sacrament?) Can I improve? (263–267)

7. What kind of work have I done so far? Do I see this as a lifetime career? What do I hope to do? How can I make my work pay the bills and help others? How can I live sacrifice through my work? (268–269, 273)

8. Do I know people who have struggled to find work? How did they struggle? How does work give us dignity? (270–272)

9. Have I ever thought about a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life? What motivated me? What discouraged me? Pope Francis reminds us that we should all be open to the possibility. Am I open? How can I be more open? (274–277)

NOTES
CHAPTER 9

Discernment

CONSIDERATIONS

This final chapter develops a theme close to Pope Francis’ heart: discernment. He has dealt with discernment in depth in other documents, which he notes as recommended reading, while this is more specifically about vocational discernment. His focus is on listening and accompaniment so each can hear the quiet voice of the Lord calling them.

After this chapter, there are some general reflection questions to conclude. Their goal is to draw out a few small lessons we can remember from this discussion rather than trying to remember all we saw in 100 questions and almost 300 paragraphs.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does the Pope note about how he will approach discernment differently here from in Gaudete et Exsultate? How does vocation discernment “seek a glimpse of that unique and mysterious plan that God has for each of us”? How important is conscience formation and regular conscience exam? Should these just be on the negative things in our life? (278–282)

2. Why does discerning a vocation require solitude and silence? Does silence close us to others? What role can they have in our discernment? What questions does Pope Francis give that he hopes are asked in discernment? Do any of these speak to my heart? Have I asked these questions? Have I spoken about vocational discernment with someone I trust? (283–286)

3. What difference does it make that our vocation is a calling from a friend? Why does it matter that our vocation is a gift? What kind of gift is it? (287–288)

4. Is a vocation a walk in the park? Where does the obligation come from? How does it make us constantly aim higher? (289–290)

5. What are the three sensitivities that the Pope recommends for those helping discernment? Do I have them or have I seen them in others? Can I listen unconditionally? Can I grasp where grace or temptation is present? Can I ask key questions? Does my listening reach a deeper level? (291–294)

6. How is discernment a form of spiritual combat? Why is it important to let go at a certain moment of accompanying someone? How does the fact that there are no easy roadmaps affect accompaniment and discernment? (295–298)

7. What does the Pope hope for each of us? Do I live that? How can I live it better?

FINAL DISCUSSION / REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What part of Christus Vivit hit me the most?

2. What did I learn? What lesson am I taking away?

3. How did reading Christus Vivit change me? What changes going forward am I making as a result of this?

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