

Original Article

Making Room for the Filipino Nones: An Exposition of Its Theological and Ecclesiological Mandate from the Lens of *Christus Vivit*

Jerwin Tampe^{1,*}

Received: 05 May 2026; Revised: 11 June 2026;
Accepted: 17 June 2026; Published: 20 June 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66074/T7L1R3B9>

Abstract

In a nation deeply rooted in Catholic tradition, this study establishes the existence and emergence of Filipino Religious Nones, identified as religiously disaffiliated yet engaged in diverse, personalized spiritual practices. Their growing presence in the country, especially in Catholic schools, underscores the need for contextual accompaniment. While being religiously disaffiliated may be temporary, the necessity of journeying with them is crucial to their faith-life integration as young individuals. Identified as individuals with reflexive spirituality, as spiritual bricoleurs, and as pilgrim-seekers, this paper highlights Pope Francis' mandate in *Christus Vivit* 235 to accompany them, grounded in its theological and ecclesiological underpinnings, namely, being in the heart of God and of the Church. It underscores the imperative for the Church to make room and embrace these Nones as seekers of truth, affirming their dignity and fostering non-coercive encounters rooted in Trinitarian communion and incarnational presence. This study employed a document review of Pope Francis' *Christus Vivit* structured in three interconnected phases: (a) historical background, situating the text within its original context; (b) exegesis, providing a close textual analysis to elucidate the author's intended meaning; and (c) hermeneutics, exploring contemporary theological and pastoral applications. This methodology gives birth to a heuristic framework for accompaniment, especially for the Nones. This heuristic framework emphasizes the integration of elements of theological

¹ Notre Dame of
Marbel University,
Koronadal City, South
Cotabato, Philippines
* [jerwintampe@
gmail.com](mailto:jerwintampe@gmail.com)

conversation and healthy pastoral restlessness, aiming to shed light on the tensions in becoming credible witnesses of evangelization without presumption or proselytism.

Keywords: accompaniment, nones, pastoral restlessness, religious disaffiliation, theological conversation

1. Introduction

‘Taking care of young people is not an optional task for the Church, but an integral part of her vocation and mission in history,’ for ‘all young people, without exception, have the right to be guided in life’s journey’(Synod of Bishops, 2018). These are sound yet challenging statements amidst the rise of the religiously unaffiliated individuals, commonly referred to as Nones, who represent one of the most significant shifts in the global religious landscape in recent decades.

In the Philippines, a nation historically defined by its deep Catholic heritage, the emergence of Filipino Nones, young people who identify as religiously disaffiliated yet engage in diverse, personalized spiritual practices, poses both a challenge and an opportunity for the Catholic Church to accompany them, especially that ‘young people place a heavy emphasis on spirituality, yet many consider religion to be merely one aspect of a fulfilling, varied existence’ (Reyes, 2023).

Accompaniment is not merely a pastoral strategy but a profound expression of the Church’s mission to mirror God’s incarnational presence, which calls her to walk especially with those in search of meaning, fostering authentic encounters with Christ without coercion or proselytism. This aligns with Pope Francis’ vision in *Christus Vivit* for theological conversation and a “healthy pastoral restlessness” that challenges the Church to move beyond traditional structures and engage young people in their cultural and spiritual contexts.

This paper highlights the theological and pastoral imperative to accompany these young individuals, drawing on Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit* as a guiding framework.

The global rise of the Nones represents a seismic shift in religious affiliation, particularly among younger generations. According to the Pew Research Center (2015), in the United States, the percentage of adults identifying as religiously unaffiliated grew from 16.1% in 2007 to 22.8% in 2014, with millennials being the most likely to identify as Nones. Similar trends are observed in Europe, Australia, and parts of Latin America, where secularization, skepticism toward institutional authority, and the appeal of individualized spirituality have fueled disaffiliation.

Taylor’s (2007) concept of the “buffered self” describes this shift, in which modern individuals prioritize personal autonomy and construct their own spiritual identities outside traditional frameworks.

Globally, Nones are not necessarily atheistic or agnostic but often engage in what sociologists term “Spiritual But Not Religious” (SBNR) practices. These include mindfulness, meditation, or eclectic spiritualities that blend elements from various traditions. They may be unchurched yet have deeper spirituality (Fuller, 2001).

Studies by Smith and Denton (2009) highlight that Nones often seek authenticity and meaning but feel alienated by perceived hypocrisy or irrelevance in organized religion. This global trend reflects broader cultural shifts toward individualism, globalization, and digital connectivity, which amplify access to diverse spiritual resources while weakening ties to institutional religion.

In the Philippines, the rise of the Nones is a relatively recent but growing phenomenon, distinct from Western patterns due to the country’s unique cultural and historical context. The 2020 census tells that the Philippines remains one of the most religious nations globally, with over 80% of its population identifying as Catholic (PSA, 2023).

However, surveys indicate a gradual increase in religious disaffiliation among Filipino youth, particularly in urban areas. While 83% of adult Filipinos say religion is very important in their lives, 7% say it is somewhat important, 3% say it is not very important, and 19% say it is *not at all important*. The Fourth Quarter 2019 Social Weather Survey result, conducted on December 13-16, 2019 can be an indication of a growing religious disaffiliation (SWS, 2020). This group, often referred to as Filipino Nones, still embodies spiritual identities that blend Catholic heritage with indigenous and global influences, reflecting the Philippines’ syncretic history of precolonial animism, Spanish Catholicism, and modern globalization.

This paper identifies three key essential identities among Filipino Nones. They are those with Reflexive Spirituality who engage in introspective practices, reinterpreting cultural practices like lighting candles for saints as personal expressions of ethics or heritage rather than religious devotion. This aligns with Taylor’s (2007) notion of reflexive selfhood, where individuals critically construct their beliefs.

Another identity is that of a Spiritual Bricolage, which weaves together Catholic rituals (e.g., attending fiestas), indigenous practices (e.g., *pagdiwata* rituals), and secular or New Age elements (e.g., mindfulness). Lastly, the Pilgrim-Seeker Nones who undertake exploratory journeys, participating in symbolic acts like processions or Visita Iglesia for cultural or existential reasons rather than for faith. Their search for transcendence mirrors the global SBNR trend. Still, it is grounded in Filipino communal values, such as *kapwa* (shared humanity), which, according to Enriquez (2013), lies at the very foundation of human values.

Unlike Western Nones, who often operate in secularized contexts, Filipino Nones retain strong cultural ties to Catholicism, even as they reject institutional affiliation. This retention is shaped by the Philippines’ history of colonial Catholicism and indigenous resilience, creating a unique spiritual landscape.

However, globalization and digital platforms introduce secular humanism and alternative spiritualities, contributing to their disaffiliation. This paper notes that Filipino Nones often cite feelings of alienation, irrelevance of traditional practices, or

historical grievances (e.g., the Church's role in colonialism) as reasons for disaffiliation, echoing global trends but contextualized by local realities (Mercadante, 2014). Cultural disaffiliation is not the same as religious disaffiliation.

Pope Francis's *Christus Vivit* provides a theological and pastoral mandate for engaging young people, including the Nones – this becomes the thesis statement of this paper, telling us on how *Christus Vivit* 235 mandates an accompaniment of the Filipino Nones proceeding from its theological and ecclesiological underpinnings, being in God's heart and the Church's heart.

Article 235 encapsulates this vision, urging the Church to make room for all youth, including those with other visions of life, through inclusive, non-proselytizing accompaniment (Francis, 2019). This mandate, rooted in the biblical concept of *ad cum panis* (sharing bread), calls for a Church that walks with young people in their spiritual journeys, fostering authentic encounters with Christ through dialogue, listening, and presence. It signifies sharing life's essentials, as seen in the early Christian practice of breaking bread (Acts 2:46). Pope Francis emphasizes that this sharing is not about proselytizing but about fostering encounters that affirm the dignity of Nones as seekers of truth, created in God's image (*Imago Dei*).

The heuristic framework, as an output of this paper, translates this mandate into a pastoral strategy for accompanying Filipino Nones.

Numerous studies, including those conducted by the Pew Research Center (2015) on *The future of world religions: Population growth projections*, have documented the growing trend of religious disaffiliation among youth, many of whom were raised in religious traditions but have since distanced themselves from structured religious groups. This phenomenon presents a significant challenge to traditional approaches to spiritual formation, particularly for the country's youth sector.

In accompanying the Nones, Pope Francis's call in *Christus Vivit* to be daring without presumption and proselytizing introduces a nuanced tension in the Philippine context, particularly in the work of evangelization. This tension arises as the Church highlights its historical role as a dominant religious institution—shaped by centuries of colonial Catholicism—against the growing presence of Filipino Nones who seek spiritual autonomy.

The call to avoid proselytism challenges traditional evangelistic methods that have emphasized conversion through preaching and institutional alignment, potentially clashing with the expectations of a faithful majority accustomed to a missionary ethos. This creates a delicate balance: in the spirit of accompaniment, how can the Church boldly reach out to the Nones, affirming their dignity and cultural practices, without imposing faith or alienating its core constituency?

Furthermore, this tension is heightened by the Philippines' unique socio-religious landscape, where communal values like *kapwa* and syncretic spirituality coexist with a legacy of evangelization tied to colonial history. Pope Francis's emphasis on accompaniment as a non-coercive, dialogical process may be perceived as a departure from the assertive evangelization that once defined the Church's mission, prompting debates among Filipino clergy and laity about the efficacy of such an approach.

This paper seeks to explore how this tension can be reconciled through a framework that honors both the Church's missionary call and the Nones' freedom, fostering a renewed evangelization that reflects hope and inclusivity.

In the Philippine context, there is a dearth of literature on the accompaniment of the Filipino Nones from the lens of *Christus Vivit*. This is the research gap this paper seeks to address. The research question is how does one anchor the mandate of the Church towards the accompaniment of the Filipino Nones, from the lens of *Christus Vivit*, which is also emphasized.

The study, seeks to address the following objectives: first, to establish the emergence of Filipino Nones who have disaffiliated from structured, institutional religion. Drawing on the reviewed literature, this study identifies the distinct characteristics of this group, particularly three prominent typologies: reflexive spirituality, spiritual bricolage, and pilgrim-seeker orientations. These findings provide the foundation for a heuristic framework to effectively accompany Filipino Nones.

Secondly, to discuss how the accompaniment of the Nones can be rooted in its theological and ecclesiological mandate, reflecting God's inclusive and compassionate heart; and lastly, to propose a heuristic framework for accompanying the Filipino Nones, anchored in the lens of *Christus Vivit* 235. This framework specifically addresses the pastoral tension between genuine evangelization and the imperative to avoid proselytism, offering a balanced, contextually relevant approach rooted in Pope Francis's teachings.

2. Methodology

This systematic theology paper employed a document review as the primary research method following the establishment of its systematic and biblical foundations. Document review is a qualitative research approach that systematically collects, analyzes, and interprets textual materials to address research questions and expand knowledge on a specific topic. This method was particularly suitable for examining theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral insights regarding the Church's mandate to accompany the Nones in Philippine Catholic schools from the lens of *Christus Vivit*. It followed a tripartite structure that ensured a comprehensive, contextually grounded, and pastorally relevant reading of the text. First, the Historical Background established the socio-ecclesial context of the document to understand its genesis and intent. This was followed by the Exegesis, which conducted a close textual analysis to interpret the document's explicit meaning. Lastly, the Hermeneutics involved theological and pastoral interpretation to apply the document's insights to contemporary issues. The methodology includes the following undertakings:

- (a) Document Selection. It is where relevant documents were present and gathered, with *Christus Vivit* serving as the primary source. Supporting

documents included related Church teachings, papal exhortations, and scholarly works that provide insights into accompaniment;

(b) Content analysis. The selected materials were analyzed thematically. Key insights were categorized into themes aligned with the research objectives, such as theological grounding, ecclesiological mandates, and pastoral strategies. Key Concepts or topics were identified and elaborated;

(c) Synthesis and Interpretation. The concepts in the conversation were emphasized at this stage. Connections were drawn between various sources to construct a coherent understanding of accompaniment for the Nones. This stage aimed to create a holistic framework that is both theologically robust and contextually relevant;

(d) Critical Analysis and Contextualization. Findings and realizations were noted to assess the applicability of the reviewed materials to the Philippine context. This step ensured that the framework for accompaniment was responsive to the cultural, social, and religious realities of the Philippine context.

Through this structured methodology, the study developed a comprehensive understanding of the theological and ecclesiological mandates for accompanying the Nones, offering practical insights for pastoral engagement.

3. Results

Pope Francis's post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit* (2019) offers a pastoral framework for accompanying young people in a rapidly changing world. The following are the four interconnected emergent themes from his on accompanying the young people today:

3.1 Inclusivity

Pope Francis strongly emphasized the need to make room for inclusivity in his response to the call to accompany the Youth. In the era of confusion and disaffiliation, his call to make room for those with other visions of life or who distance themselves from religion reflects his vision of a Church that is inclusive, welcoming all, especially those who feel left behind, on the margins, and disconnected from structured religion.

In the Philippines, where the majority of the population is Catholic, Filipino Nones, who constitute a small minority, often feel marginalized due to their rejection of institutional religion while retaining cultural practices for social reasons. Pope Francis' call for inclusivity urges the Church to create spaces where Nones can explore their spiritualities without pressure to conform.

In *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), Pope Francis emphasizes the existence of dialogue across differences (§ 214), highlighting that inclusivity is not about conversion but about building mutual understanding. Similarly, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, he advocates for a Church that "goes forth" to the peripheries, preferring one "bruised, hurting and dirty"

over one confined to its own security (§49). This vision challenges the Filipino Church to move beyond its Catholic-centric framework to embrace Nones who may identify with Reflexive Spirituality, on Spiritual Bricolage Nones, or Pilgrim-Seekers, each with unique spiritual expressions.

Pope Francis addresses every person living on this planet, not just Catholics, with his inclusive outreach (LS, § 3), welcoming those who are in “irregular” situations (AL, § 296-308). He envisions an inclusive church toward marginalized groups, including the LGBTQ+ community, which parallels the need to include Nones. His inclusivity is a cornerstone of his papacy. In *Misericordiae Vultus* (2015), he describes mercy as the “bridge that connects God and man”, pointing to the Church’s role in extending mercy to all, including those who reject religion. His statement, “Who am I to judge?” made in response to questions about gay priests, and those who seek spirituality outside traditional frameworks, reinforces the theological imperative to make room for diverse visions, rooted in the Gospel’s call to love one another.

For Filipino Nones, this principle means creating pastoral spaces that respect their Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR) identities.

While the vision and the call are noble, a question is raised on this matter: How can Filipino Catholics authentically “make room” for Nones who explicitly reject religion without either compromising the Church’s core mission of evangelization or appearing to endorse secularism, risking a dilution of Catholic identity in a nation where the Church’s cultural authority is already under strain from growing secular trends?

Simply put, how can Filipino Catholics authentically engage Nones without compromising the Church’s evangelistic mission or appearing to endorse secularism?

3.1.1 Theological Framework of Inclusivity and Evangelization

Pope Francis’s call to “make room” for Nones aligns with the Catholic Church’s post-Vatican II emphasis on dialogue and universal salvation, as articulated in documents like *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*. The Church recognizes the inherent dignity of all persons, created in God’s image (*imago Dei*), and the possibility of salvation for those outside formal membership, provided they follow their conscience in seeking truth.

However, the Church’s core mission of evangelization, rooted in Christ’s Great Commission (Mt 28:19–20), remains non-negotiable: Catholics are called to proclaim the Gospel as the fullest expression of truth and salvation. The tension lies in how to “make room” for Nones—who explicitly reject religion—without diluting this mission or appearing to legitimize secularism, which could undermine the Church’s identity in a Filipino context where Catholicism shapes social cohesion.

In the Philippines, where the majority of the population identifies as Catholic, the Church has long been a cultural and moral authority. However, the rise of Nones, particularly among urban youth influenced by globalized secular values, challenges this dominance. The question’s concern about “dilution of Catholic identity” reflects

the fear that engaging Nones too inclusively might weaken the Church's distinctiveness in a society where Catholicism is intertwined with national identity (e.g., through festivals like Sinulog or devotion to the Black Nazarene). Simultaneously, Nones may view the Church as an outdated institution, making authentic engagement difficult without appearing patronizing or endorsing their rejection of faith.

Theologically, "making room" does not mean compromising the Church's mission but reimagining how it is lived out. Pope Francis's emphasis on accompaniment (*Evangelii Gaudium* 169–173) suggests a pastoral approach rooted in encounter, listening, and journeying with others, rather than immediate conversion.

For Filipino Catholics, this means engaging Nones not as targets for proselytism but as persons whose dignity demands respect, even in their rejection of religion. The ambiguity of "other visions of life" invites a broad interpretation: it could encompass secular humanism, agnosticism, or even indigenous Filipino spiritualities that blend with modern secularism.

The challenge is to avoid two extremes: (1) reducing evangelization to mere inclusion, which risks relativism, and (2) rejecting Nones' perspectives outright, which alienates them and contradicts the Church's call to dialogue. This approach is grounded in the principle of *sensus fidei* (the sense of the faithful) and in the Church's universal call to holiness (LG, § 39-42).

Filipino Catholics can "make room" by recognizing that Nones, though unaffiliated, may still seek meaning and truth, which the Church believes are ultimately found in Christ (*Redemptor Hominis*, 11). This does not mean endorsing secularism but discerning where God's grace is at work in Nones' lives (cf. Rom 2:14–16). The risk of appearing to legitimize secularism can be mitigated by framing engagement as a dialogue oriented toward truth, rather than a neutral acceptance of all views.

The question's concern about the Church's cultural authority under strain is valid. The Philippines' Catholic identity, rooted in over 400 years of tradition, faces challenges from globalization, urbanization, and secular media, which influence Nones' rejection of religion. If "making room" is perceived as weakness or relativism, it could embolden secular critiques or alienate devout Catholics, especially in rural areas where traditionalism is strong. To counter this, Filipino Catholics must root their outreach in a confident, not defensive, proclamation of faith. For example, catechesis could emphasize that engaging Nones is an act of mission, not compromise, drawing on *Ad Gentes* (§ 11), which calls for dialogue with non-Christians while upholding the Gospel's truth.

The tension between inclusion and evangelization is not a contradiction but an opportunity to live out the Gospel's universal call in a Filipino context. By grounding their efforts in charity, dialogue, and doctrinal fidelity, Catholics can engage Nones without endorsing secularism or diluting their identity, ensuring the Church remains a vibrant force in a changing Philippines. The challenge lies in addressing this

ambiguity with courage and wisdom, trusting that God's grace works even in those who "distance themselves from religion altogether."

3.2 Belongingness

Pope Francis' assertion in *Christus Vivit* that "all the young, without exception, are in God's heart and thus in the Church's heart" articulates a theological vision of universal love and pastoral inclusion, particularly echoing in the Philippines, where youth comprise a majority of the population. The phrase reflects a theological claim rooted in the belief that God's love is universal (John 3:16) and that the Church, as the body of Christ, extends this love to all. In Catholic theology, God's love is not contingent on human actions or beliefs; it is a gift extended to all (CCC, § 605).

However, translating this theological ideal into practical inclusion is challenging, especially for groups who may feel excluded due to specific doctrines, historical practices, or cultural disconnects. Thus, Pope Francis emphasizes the call to love and accompany all youth, including those who are distant or skeptical.

'Without Exception' implies that no young person is excluded from the Church's care, even those who reject its teachings, are nonbelievers, or belong to other faiths. However, this raises a concern about possible misunderstanding, as it could be interpreted as an automatic claim on all youth, positioning the Church as a universal caregiver without requiring their consent or participation.

3.2.1 The Filipino Nones in the heart of God and of the Church

The Philippines, with the majority of its population identifying as Catholic, remains a stronghold of Christian faith in Asia (Lipka, 2015). However, secularization among urban youth, driven by globalization, digital culture, and disillusionment with clerical scandals, has led to a rise in Nones, particularly among those aged 15–34 (Cornelio and Salera, 2020).

The phrase "in God's heart" reflects the Catholic belief in God's universal love and mercy. God's love is boundless and extends to all people, regardless of their religious affiliation or lack thereof. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) teaches that "God wills the salvation of everyone" (§, 851), and God's grace operates in ways that transcend human understanding, even among those who do not explicitly profess faith (§ 847). In this sense, Nones are still within the scope of God's love and redemptive plan.

The Church, as the Body of Christ, is called to reflect God's love and mercy in its mission. The Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* describes the Church as the "people of God" with a mission to evangelize and serve all humanity. Pope Francis's emphasis on synodality and a "Church that goes forth" highlights the Church's role in reaching out to those on the peripheries, including Nones, with compassion and dialogue.

In the Philippines, the Church has historically played a significant role in shaping cultural and moral values. Filipino Nones, while not formally affiliated, may still engage with Catholic practices or cultural expressions of faith due to the country's deep Catholic heritage. The Church holds a special concern for these individuals, seeking to accompany them pastorally without judgment, as Francis often advocated for a Church that is a "field hospital" for the wounded.

However, the phrase "in the Church's heart" raises a pastoral question: Does it entail unconditional acceptance of their spiritual bricolage, or a call to guide their reflexive and pilgrim journeys toward Christ? This tension risks either alienating Nones through rigid dogmatism or diluting doctrine by uncritically embracing their pluralistic spiritualities.

The call to accompaniment offers a robust framework for resolving this tension. Grounded in Scripture, accompaniment reflects God's relational presence with humanity, even in doubt or waywardness.

Pope Francis synthesizes this tradition, calling the Church to "be present to those who have other ways of living their spiritual experience without trying to impose our own vision, but rather accompanying them on their journey". This affirms the Nones' dignity as created in God's image (*Imago Dei*, Gen. 1:27) while upholding the Church's mission to guide all toward Christ (Jn. 14:6).

Accompaniment distinguishes between accepting persons and endorsing beliefs, allowing the Church to embrace Nones' spiritual bricolage and reflexive spirituality as starting points for dialogue, while gently guiding their pilgrim seeker ethos toward the Gospel.

In the Filipino context, this aligns with *kapwa*, fostering relational presence that respects Nones' exploratory identities without compromising doctrinal clarity. The Church's heart reflects God's universal love (1 Jn. 4:7–8), which embraces all while inviting them to the truth (Eph. 4:15), guided by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13).

The tension between affirming Nones and maintaining doctrinal clarity may be clarified by embodying Christ's relational approach, as seen in his encounter with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:1–42). This approach meets Nones in their spiritual bricolage and reflexive spirituality, affirming their dignity while guiding their pilgrim seeker journey toward truth.

The statement "Filipino Nones are in God's heart and in the Church's heart" reflects Pope Francis's theology of mercy and inclusion, emphasizing God's universal love and the Church's mission to embrace all people, including those without religious affiliation. However, its ambiguity lies in the Nones' undefined status, the potential implications of religious indifference, and the tension between pastoral openness and doctrinal clarity. These issues can be problematic if misinterpreted as undermining the Church's evangelizing mission or the necessity of faith in Christ.

To resolve these concerns, the Church may clarify that God and the Church love Nones as part of its missionary outreach, not as an endorsement of non-affiliation. Grounding the statement in Catholic teaching, emphasizing evangelization, and leveraging the Philippines' Catholic culture, the Church can address the rise of the

Nones with compassion and clarity, inviting them into a deeper relationship with Christ while maintaining doctrinal integrity. This approach aligns with Francis' vision of a Church that is a "mother with an open heart," walking with all people toward the truth and love of the Gospel.

3.3 Self-Critique

In article 235 of *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis models a key aspect of his pastoral style by frankly acknowledging the gap between the Church's ideals and its concrete actions: "We recognize frankly that this statement on our lips does not always find real expression in our pastoral actions: often we remain closed in our environments, where their voice does not penetrate, or else we dedicate ourselves to less demanding and more enjoyable activities, suppressing that healthy pastoral restlessness that would urge us to move out from our supposed security."

This self-critique is not peripheral but an emergent and foundational theme in Pope Francis' approach to accompanying young people. It reflects a humble ecclesiology that recognizes the Church's sins and limitations as obstacles to its mission, particularly toward those on the margins, such as the Filipino Nones.

3.3.1 Theological and Pastoral Roots of Self-Critique

Self-critique flows from the Gospel's call to conversion (*metanoia*) and the Church's identity as *semper reformanda* (always in need of reform). Pope Francis echoes Vatican II's emphasis on the Church as the People of God, not an infallible institution detached from its members' weaknesses. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he warns against a "tomb psychology," "gray pragmatism," spiritual sloth, and the temptation to cling to security rather than venture into mission.

In *Christus Vivit*, he applies this directly to youth ministry, urging schools and pastoral structures toward urgent self-criticism based on results. He acknowledges serious reasons why some youth see the Church as a "nuisance": sexual and financial scandals, ill-prepared clergy, passive roles for the young, and difficulty explaining doctrine in contemporary society.

This mirrors his broader critique of clericalism, described as a "perversion," "scourge," and "illness" that creates elitism, separates clergy from the laity, and stifles the missionary spirit.

Filipino Nones, even while retaining cultural Catholic practices, often cite feeling marginalized or judged. The Church's historical role as a moral and cultural authority can foster defensiveness rather than the "healthy pastoral restlessness" Francis advocates.

Self-critique challenges the tendency toward comfortable, inward-focused activities (e.g., maintaining traditional devotions without outreach) over daring engagement with skeptics or the disaffiliated.

This theme intersects with the others: Inclusivity requires first admitting where the Church has failed to make room. Belongingness demands acknowledging how closed structures have excluded many from feeling truly in the Church's heart. Becoming Daring is only possible after confronting the suppression of restlessness and the preference for security.

3.3.2 Tension and Practical Challenges

A key question arises: How can authentic self-critique strengthen the Church's witness without descending into self-flagellation or eroding the confidence needed for evangelization? In the Philippines, excessive focus on institutional failures could alienate devout Catholics who value tradition, while insufficient critique risks perpetuating the very issues driving disaffiliation.

Theologically, self-critique is rooted in trust in the Holy Spirit's ongoing work and the Church's holiness despite human sinfulness (cf. *Lumen Gentium*). It is not about diluting identity but purifying it for mission. Pope Francis envisions a "bruised, hurting and dirty" Church on the streets rather than a pristine but closed one.

3.4 *Becoming Daring, Without Presumption and Proselytizing*

Being daring may be uncomfortable for those accustomed to the colonial structure or system of evangelization handed down by their ancestors. For Filipino Catholics, "being daring" in this context implies stepping outside the comfort zone of traditional religious practices and cultural expectations to engage authentically with Nones. This involves challenging cultural norms of conformity as Filipino Catholics are often expected to express their faith through visible, communal acts.

Being daring means embracing unconventional approaches to faith-sharing that prioritize dialogue over ritualistic displays. It also entails dealing with one's vulnerability, especially that engaging Nones often means facing skepticism, criticism, or indifference—openly sharing personal faith experiences, doubts, and struggles rather than presenting a polished, conformist version of Catholicism. This authenticity goes with Nones, who often value genuine human connection over institutional rhetoric.

Being daring also calls for respecting the diversity of belief. In a conformist culture, it means respecting the Nones' lack of belief without judgment, and this requires a shift from the expectation that everyone should share Catholic values to an acceptance of pluralism, which can feel risky in a society where Catholicism is the norm.

It is also good to note the challenges of being daring. Filipino Catholics who deviate from traditional expressions of faith may face criticism from their community, family, or church for being too liberal or not Catholic enough. Engaging with the Nones may lead Catholics to confront their own uncertainties about faith, especially when faced with the intellectual or emotional arguments of Nones. The collectivist

nature of Filipino culture, which emphasizes group harmony, can make individual acts of daring feel isolating or confrontational.

Being daring allows Filipino Catholics to bridge the gap between their faith and the growing number of Nones, fostering mutual understanding. It aligns with the Catholic call to evangelize in a way that respects modern sensibilities, making faith relevant in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

3.4.1 A Vision of a Non-Proselytizing Evangelization

Pope Francis' vision of evangelization is bold yet humble, focusing on witnessing to God's love rather than imposing beliefs. This approach is particularly relevant for Filipino Nones, who prioritize personal spirituality and ethical living over doctrinal adherence. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes that "an evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (§ 24)" emphasizing that evangelization begins with God's love, not human effort. His rejection of proselytizing, as seen in his 2013 interview where he called it "solemn nonsense", underscores a relational approach that respects others' autonomy.

In *Christus Vivit*, the Pope encourages young people to be "missionary disciples" who "bear witness to the love of God by their lives", a model that avoids presumption and focuses on authentic relationships, for "being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (§ 129). This daring outreach is essential for reaching Nones, who may be open to spiritual experiences but wary of institutional religion.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis critiques proselytizing, preferring a Church tired yet happy from fighting on the front lines, "a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security" (§ 49). In *Fratelli Tutti*, he calls for a "culture of encounter" that transcends differences, aligning with non-proselytizing evangelization.

Pope Francis' non-proselytizing evangelization is rooted in his theology of mercy. In *Misericordiae Vultus*, he describes mercy as the heart of the Gospel, suggesting that evangelization must be an act of love, not coercion (§ 12). For Filipino Nones, this principle means engaging them through acts of love rather than doctrinal arguments.

What is Pope Francis' take on Proselytizing? Edward Pentin (2019), in his article, presents Pope Francis' message to Jesuits in Mozambique on what he means by evangelization as free, while pointing out how Proselytism makes one lose freedom, incapable of creating a religious path in liberty, leaving people subjugated in one way or another. In a term, the Pope sees Proselytism as not a Christian approach to evangelization, and this is not 'becoming a witness'.

Pope Francis clarified that evangelizers never violate the conscience but rather announce, sow, and help to grow. However, whoever proselytizes violates people's conscience, and this does not make them free; it makes them dependent.

Evangelization gives you a filial dependence; that is, it makes you free and able to grow. Proselytizing gives you a humble dependence at the level of the conscience and society. The dependence of the evangelized person, the "filial" dependence, is the memory of the grace that God has given you. The proselyte instead depends not as a child but as an enslaved person who, in the end, does not know what to do unless they are told (Spadaro SJ, 2019).

Pope Francis' statement in *Evangelii Gaudium* (§ 1-3) invites everyone to rethink what it means to share one's faith, highlighting evangelization as not about pushing people to believe or laying strict rules but about sharing something beautiful and joyful, like inviting someone to a feast filled with warmth, love, and hope.

Pope Francis recognizes that even in places where Christianity has been around for centuries, there are still people who feel lost or have never truly encountered Jesus. He sees this not as a failure but as an opportunity. Even if they don't show it, these people may be quietly searching for a deeper meaning in life. The Pope's message is simple: everyone is responsible for reaching out to them, not by preaching to them, but by genuinely caring and showing the joy of knowing Christ.

He stresses that everyone has a right to hear the Good News. This isn't just a duty—it's a privilege to share one's experience of God's love. But he warns that it must be done without pressure or judgment. Instead of making people feel burdened or unwelcome, Christians should be like friends who want to share something wonderful that's made their lives better.

In article 14, the Pope highlighted that "evangelization is about preaching the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him." He emphasized the longings and desires of the many who quietly seek God, led by a yearning to see his face, even in countries of ancient Christian tradition. He also highlights that it is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction (*EG*, § 14). Pope Francis says that faith spreads not because arguments or debates convince people, but because a lived life reflects the beauty of God's love. Imagine a community full of kindness, peace, and joy that draws people in. That's what the Pope envisions.

4. Discussion

4.1 Making Room for the Filipino Nones

The emergent themes on Pope Francis' call to accompany the Nones, present a synodal picture of the life of the Church and her effort to accompany her people. Aware of her shortcomings, her initiative to reexamine her engagement with the youth

is remarkable. However, the tension persists, especially in becoming daring without proselytizing in the act of evangelization. His frequent condemnations of proselytism have sparked considerable debate within Catholic circles, often leading to questions about the Church's missionary mandate and the universality of Christ's salvific role.

Francis has consistently defined proselytism as a form of coercive or disrespectful persuasion that violates human freedom. The term "proselytism," derived from the Greek *prosēlytos* (προσήλυτος), is used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, where it denotes a "convert" or "sojourner"—someone who changes religion or opinion.

In its original biblical context, it simply referred to persuasion toward faith without connotations of force. Over time, however, the word has undergone a semantic shift, acquiring negative associations in interreligious and ecumenical dialogues, particularly post-Vatican II. Today, it often implies unethical tactics such as manipulation, pressure, or inducement, reflecting broader cultural sensitivities to colonialism and religious imperialism.

The article by Bishop Robert Barron (2023), published in *Word on Fire*, exemplifies a significant intra-Catholic tension over the concepts of evangelization and proselytism in contemporary ecclesial discourse. This tension arose where Barron delivered presentations explicitly aimed at evangelization, responding to "no interest in converting anyone to Christ or to the Catholic Church" remarks by Cardinal-elect Américo Aguiar, the World Youth Day event's organizer, emphasizing interfaith dialogue and mutual encounter among youth (Silva, 2023)".

Barron's subsequent rebuke by papal biographer Austen Ivereigh in *Commonweal* highlighted a perceived divide: Ivereigh accused Barron of conflating evangelization (facilitating an "encounter with the living Christ") with proselytism (actively seeking conversion to the Catholic Church), arguing that the latter contradicts authentic evangelization. This exchange underscores broader debates within Catholicism on mission, conversion, and ecclesiology, particularly under Pope Francis's pontificate, where proselytism has been critiqued as coercive while evangelization is promoted as relational witness.

This framing reveals a core tension—whether evangelization inherently leads to ecclesial conversion or remains a non-committal spiritual experience. Barron counters that separating an "encounter with Christ" from communion with the Church creates a "painful wedge," echoing classical ecclesiology, in which the Church is Christ's Mystical Body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12–27; Eph 1:22–23). He draws on Cardinal Francis George's analogy: "You can't know Christ apart from the Church, which is his body," arguing that a Christ detached from the institution risks becoming an "agnostic fantasy" (Coggiatti, 2023).

This tension is not merely semantic but reflects divergent visions of Catholic mission in a pluralistic world. Barron views Ivereigh's approach as reducing evangelization to "pre-evangelization"—preparatory steps like dialogue that must culminate in conversion—or else it becomes "an absurdity." Ivereigh, conversely, prioritizes "accompaniment" and "listening," aligning with synodal themes that

emphasize conversion as organic rather than imposed. The debate thus pits a more traditional, conversion-oriented evangelization against a post-Vatican II emphasis on inculturation and respect for other faiths.

Central to Ivereigh's stance is a nuanced interpretation of Francis's terminology, in which evangelization is relational witness and proselytism is its worldly distortion. He agrees with Barron on the inseparability of Christ and the Church—echoing *Lumen Gentium's* mystical body doctrine—but insists the *how* of evangelization matters profoundly.

4.2 The Heuristic Framework in Accompanying the Nones in the Philippine Context

In paragraph 235, he writes: "The Gospel also asks us to be daring, and we want to be so, without presumption and without proselytizing, testifying to the love of the Lord and stretching out our hands to all the young people in the world." This directive encapsulates Francis's vision of evangelization as an inclusive, witness-driven encounter—rooted in the synodal spirit of dialogue and mutual enrichment—rather than coercive recruitment.

In the Philippine context, this statement introduces a profound tension as well. For Filipino Catholics, whose collective memory of evangelization is inextricably linked to the proselytizing zeal of Spanish colonialism, the distinction between sharing the Gospel and actively converting others often blurs. Historical experiences of faith transmission through persuasion, adaptation, and outright coercion have embedded proselytism within the very fabric of Filipino Catholicism, making Francis's admonition to "evangelize without proselytizing" both liberating and challenging.

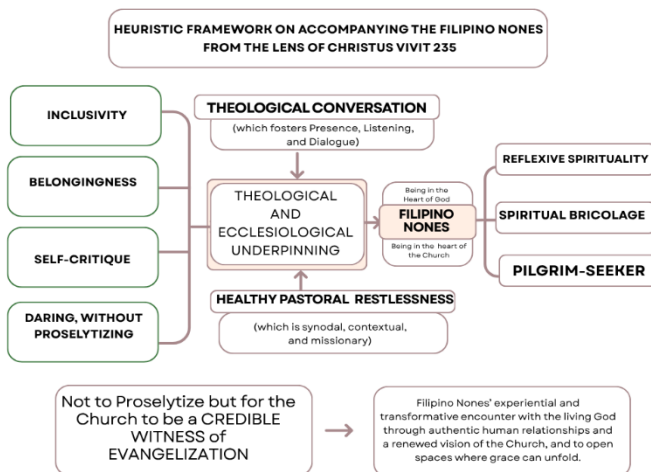


Figure 1. Heuristic framework on accompanying the Filipino nones.

It prompts a reevaluation of how the Church engages its youth: Can Filipino pastoral workers foster authentic encounters with Christ amid a legacy where evangelization and colonial imposition were synonymous?

This heuristic framework, anchored in *Christus Vivit* 235, is crafted as a flexible tool for accompanying the Filipino Nones and as a starting point for pastoral discernment, always open to adaptation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It may work in some contexts and not in others due to the profound diversity among this group—ranging from urban agnostics shaped by global secularism to those with lingering ties to folk Catholicism, each with unique experiences and resistances rooted in historical and cultural realities.

Considering the unique identities of the Filipino Nones with their essential characteristics, this heuristic framework on accompaniment is designed in which the end goal is not to control but an encounter with the living God through authentic human relationships and a renewed vision of Church, and to open spaces where grace can unfold, not to force religious affiliation, but to accompany Filipino Nones from isolated, self-constructed spirituality toward an authentic, communal, and transformative relationship with Christ and His Church—all through freedom, dialogue, and shared mission. This is in response to the identified tension in evangelization.

The framework recognizes that Filipino Nones are not necessarily non-spiritual but are actively engaged in constructing meaningful spiritual lives outside traditional religious structures.

Following Pope Francis' call in *Christus Vivit* to 'walk with' the youth and 'not talk at' them brings to the value of authenticity and listening, to show "a Church with open doors". Young people need to be approached with the grammar of love, not by being preached at. This shows that young people are more moved by action than by preaching.

The Church does not accompany to control, but to propose—to become a credible witness to a God who listens before speaking, welcomes before judging, and journeys before leading. In doing so, the Church becomes truly missionary, not through coercion but through communion. The end goal, therefore, is not to "fix" the Nones, but to open spaces where grace can unfold—where questions are not dismissed, pain is not invalidated, and faith may gradually be rekindled through love, encounter, and trust, and this is only possible with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis calls for an "outgoing" Church that moves beyond traditional boundaries to meet those who may feel distant from the institutional Church. He explicitly calls for an inclusive experiential pastoral activities and approaches sensitive to the plurality of young people's beliefs and backgrounds, urging youth ministers to create room for Pastoral Restlessness that has to be synodal, popular or contextual and missionary, where guidance and freedom allow young people to grow in faith through meaningful relationships rather than rigid instruction, pointing out the need for the

youth to be engaged in meaningful pastoral activities that provide significant engagement. He highlights such engagement with urgency:

There is a need to examine how such groups participate in the Church's overall pastoral care, and to foster greater communion among them and better coordination of their activities. Although it is never easy to approach young people, two things have become increasingly evident: the realization that the entire community has to evangelize them and the urgent requirement that young people take on a more significant role in pastoral outreach (Christus vivit, 202)

These elements of pastoral restlessness were Pope's description on how the matter should be, found in his document *Christus vivit*.

Filipino Nones whose search for meaning and belonging often unfolds outside traditional religious structures are not necessarily indifferent to faith; rather, they seek spaces where they can encounter genuine care, purpose, and community. Studies on youth disaffiliation, such as those conducted by the Pew Research Center (2024), show that young people who identify as Nones often cite a lack of meaningful connection as a reason for distancing themselves from organized religion. They feel disconnected, not necessarily because of doctrinal issues but because they need to see a place for themselves within the community. Pope Francis, in *Christus Vivit*, recognizes this and calls for contextual, synodal and missionary approaches and "inclusive ministries," providing room for everyone—including those with doubts and frustrations.

The diversity of human expressions make accompaniment of the Nones a very complicated effort. With the limitation of available materials on the how and why of accompanying them, this humble framework on accompanying the Filipino Nones from the lens of *Christus Vivit* 235 is designed not as prescriptive or universal, but heuristic.

What is new in the framework? While Pope Francis has remarkably established the mandate to accompany, the following elements may be emphasized: the concept of Theological Conversation that fosters Presence, Listening, and Dialogue, and the Healthy Pastoral Restlessness that must be Synodal, Contextual, and Missionary.

4.3 Theological Conversation As a Movement in Accompanying the Nones

Dialogue, listening, and presence are not only recurrent themes in *Christus Vivit* but also essential elements in accompanying the Nones in response to the challenges they encounter, as evidenced by the literature used in this study. Healthy presence, patient listening, and dialogue find their biblical grounding, calling every faithful person to be mindful of them as they accompany one another.

Quality presence speaks a lot in the process. It conveys the abiding presence of the Yahweh amidst the journey of his chosen people in the wilderness. Healthy presence brings healing. It brings value to the process of accompaniment, as it allows

the Nones to see their worth as friends and companions on the journey, and it goes along with dialogue and listening.

Dialogue is an open, respectful exchange that seeks mutual understanding and deeper connection, an expression of God's mercy, non-judgment, and inclusion. For the Filipino Nones, dialogue acknowledges their experiences, questions, and even criticisms of faith without dismissing or minimizing them. Jesus engaged in transformative dialogue, such as with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-26), meeting her where she was, respecting her life story, and gently leading her toward truth.

In Fratelli Tutti, 198, Pope Francis talks about dialogue as "approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground." He highlighted that if one wants to encounter and help one another, they have to dialogue. Persistent and courageous dialogue quietly helps the world to live much better than one can imagine.

He envisions a culture of dialogue as something far more profound than simply sharing ideas or exchanging opinions. In a sense, authentic dialogue is about encountering others with genuine openness, recognizing their dignity, and being willing to listen and understand where they are coming from. It is not about convincing someone of the point to prove, but about building relationships rooted in mutual respect and shared values, and about seeking the lost, reaching out to them, and rejoicing over their return.

Pope Francis' approach to dialogue reminds the faithful that accompanying the Nones is not about imposing beliefs or convincing them to fit a mold. Instead, it is about meeting them where they are, with genuine care and a desire to understand their personal stories. When Filipino Nones are approached with open hearts and without judgment, their dignity and self-worth are acknowledged, thus creating an environment where authentic relationships can flourish. This kind of accompaniment calls for a deep presence—being there to listen and share without any hidden agenda. That is why the Pope highlights the importance of a youth ministry that is inclusive and creates a 'home' open to all in the Church and Schools. This highlights a pastoral style marked by gentleness, accompaniment, and formation, as highlighted in the Scriptures (1 Thes 2:7-12; 2 Tim 2:24-26; Col 3:12-14).

Listening is a pastoral care that goes beyond hearing words: it involves deep, empathetic attention to another's experiences, emotions, and unspoken needs. It aligns with the biblical call to "be quick to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19). Jesus exemplified active listening when He responded to those who approached Him, such as Bartimaeus, who cried out for mercy (Mk 10:46-52). By listening attentively, He acknowledged their dignity and transformed their lives.

The word listen/hear has its roots in the Hebrew word *Shema*, from Deuteronomy 6:4-5: "Listen, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength". Deuteronomy 6:4-5 presents the *Shema*, also known as the *Shema* prayer, with the deeper meaning of 'Listen.' The Bible Project (2023) traces the word 'listen' to its Hebrew origin, which

means ‘pay attention’: *Shema* means to pay attention. Leah named her son Simon (*Shim'on*) to remind herself that God was listening (Genesis 29:33). It means to act on a request. This is the listening we want God to do when we pray to him (Psalm 27:7). *Shema* means to obey God’s commandments. In Hebrew, listening and doing are two sides of the same coin – which is still how Jesus sees it today (Exodus 19:5, Mark 12:28-29).

Through attentive listening, mentors can discern the signs of the Spirit at work, allowing for a more fruitful accompaniment. By incorporating Christ’s ministry of listening and compassion, mentors can provide a space where young people can encounter Christ and experience His love by McCarthy and Vitek (2018) made a clear point:

Listening and hearing the stories of those who disaffiliate from the Church are essential and constitutive dimensions of what it means to be a community of faith. The dynamics of disaffiliation cannot be fully understood when limited to statistics presented in bar graphs or generalized, categorical groupings. Each person who disaffiliates has a name, a story, and longings of the heart and mind, and all are grateful for the opportunity to have their story heard.

4.4 Healthy Pastoral Restlessness: A Dynamic Impulse

Pastoral restlessness, as a dynamic, spirit-driven unease or holy discontent that compels the Church and its ministers to move beyond complacency and comfort zones, urges a person to actively engage with those distant from faith through bold, inclusive, and creative outreach.

This restlessness counters stagnation in pastoral work, pushing the Church to seek authentic encounters with others and to reflect God’s relentless love. Pastoral restlessness is rooted in the *missio Dei* (God’s mission), embodying God’s seeking love (e.g., Lk 15:4-7). It drives the Church to respond to the needs of the Filipino Nones through a missionary impulse.

Pope Francis describes this as a “healthy pastoral restlessness” that urges the Church to leave “closed environments” and engage all youth daringly, without presumption. It is a call to action against the “paralysis” of routine ministry (Rice, 2019). Pastoral Integration, Community Immersion and Experiential Service Learning Program are but few of the examples which can provide opportunities to young Filipino to deepen their faith and encounter the presence of the Divine in the plights of the poor, especially that the rise of Filipino Nones is a reflection of a global trends of religious disaffiliation, particularly among youth disillusioned by institutional religion’s perceived irrelevance or historical complicity in colonial oppression (Cornelio, 2016).

Cornelio (2010) defines reflexive spirituality as a process in which Filipino youth critically engage with their faith, emphasizing personal experience, meaning-making,

and selective appropriation of religious traditions. As pilgrim-seekers, Nones prioritize experiential, autonomous spiritual journeys over fixed affiliations. *The elements of Christus Vivit 235—inclusivity, belongingness, self-critique, and daring in proselytizing*—provide a framework for accompaniment, urging the Church to meet Nones where they are, acknowledge pastoral shortcomings, and engage courageously.

Healthy Pastoral restlessness emphasizes mentorship and accompaniment, encouraging every faithful to adopt an approach that is non-judgmental, empathetic, and focused on building trusting relationships.

4.5 Healthy Pastoral Restlessness' Synodal, Contextual and Missionary Approaches

A synodal, contextual, and missionary encounter hopes to deepen the sense of self, foster a sense of belonging, and foster the spirit of community within the Church of every Filipino None, especially as they tackle questions of faith and identity.

It provides them with pathways to connect with their inner selves, find a sense of purpose, and counter the trend of religious disaffiliation through genuine engagement and acceptance. It leads them to recognize the sacred presence as the Lord of creation, history and intimacy amidst their active involvement in the Church's life and missions.

This framework acknowledges that there is more to traditional catechetical methods in journeying with the Nones and hence emphasizes relational and experiential forms of engagement.

Accompaniment is not only an act of encountering Jesus in the mission of evangelization and becoming a spirit-filled evangelizer, but also a process of growing in maturity in the ecclesial life while extending pastoral care, intensifying the healing presence, and engaging in transformative missionary activities. One's encounter with the Lord, through immersive engagement, inspires him to meet others, especially in the peripheries, so that they may, too, experience God's presence. For young people who disaffiliate, like the Filipino Nones, an accompanying presence may not take away all their burdens, but at least reminds them of God's goodness, presence, and mercy.

Contextual Encounter ensures that the Church connects with young people in ways that are relevant to their cultural and social contexts. Pope Francis acknowledges the power of these cultural expressions, encouraging the Church to enter into the world of Filipino Nones with respect for their autonomy. He highlights the community's important role in the accompaniment of young people, "regarding them with understanding, appreciation and affection, and without constantly judging them or demanding of them a perfection beyond their years".

For accompaniment to be contextual and experiential, it must meet young people where they are, both physically and metaphorically. This includes online platforms, community centers, and schools—spaces where young people feel comfortable and understood. Pope Francis encourages the Church to develop a "youthful" mindset, one that embraces innovation, vitality, and openness as he sees how they can help keep the church young, and stop her from becoming corrupt; keeping her moving forward,

preventing her from being proud and sectarian, helping her to be poorer and to bear better witness, to take the side of the poor and the outcast, to fight for justice and humbly to let herself be challenged. This calls for a departure from rigid structures and an openness to adapting the Gospel message to the realities of youth.

Synodal fosters inclusivity and dialogue, enabling young people to feel heard and valued as co-creators of the Church's mission. A synodal encounter prioritizes collaborative decision-making and active participation, recognizing young people not as passive recipients but as co-creators of the Church's mission. Pope Francis acknowledges that young people "can offer the Church the beauty of youth by renewing her ability to rejoice with new beginnings, to give unreservedly of herself, to be renewed and to set out for ever greater accomplishments." A synodal approach to accompaniment transforms the Church into a space of "growth and maturity, attracting new young people to an experience of the Lord, and those who have already had that experience to mature in it" engaging young people in the processes and fostering environments where they feel recognized and valued toward a deeper communion with Christ and one another.

Missionary transforms the Church into an outward-looking body, reaching those on the margins and inviting them into a life of faith. Missionary Encounter is not static or confined to traditional settings; it is an active, dynamic effort to engage young people in their diverse contexts. Activities that may provide opportunities for encounter, accompaniment, and outreach may help transform the lives of young people, especially those who feel estranged from the Church.

Accompaniment begins with an encounter—a foundational element of evangelization. This encounter is not merely a meeting but a relational and transformative experience that reflects Christ's mission. Pope Francis describes this as a ministry of "proximity" and "presence," emphasizing the importance of meeting young people where they are physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Pope Francis calls this a ministry of "presence that makes Christ visible," an art of accompaniment, in which the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. Filipino Nones often feel excluded, if not misunderstood, within traditional Church structures; hence, Pope Francis' call to accompany them resonates, as he said, "we need only to accompany and encourage them, trusting a little more in the genius of the Holy Spirit, who acts as he wills."

An encounter that is missionary addresses this alienation by creating spaces of compassion, understanding, and inclusion: "Young people are greatly enriched when they overcome their reticence and dare to visit homes, and in this way make contact with people's lives. They learn how to look beyond their family and their group of friends, and they gain a broader vision of life." The missionary dimension challenges the Church to step out of its comfort zones and engage young people in their unique realities, aligned to Pope Francis' vision, articulated in *Christus Vivit*, for a Church that actively walks with young people, empowering them to become the protagonists of their faith journey and witnesses to the world. Highlighting the importance of "faith in action," a missionary encounter is vital for the faith formation of the young,

especially for the Filipino Nones. Their participation in community services, outreach programs, and immersion activities may help them live out the values of compassion, justice, and social responsibility, reinforcing a sense of purpose and belonging.

5. Conclusion

This paper, *Making Room for the Filipino Nones: An Exposition of Its Theological and Ecclesiological Mandate from the Lens of Christus Vivit*, has illuminated the profound theological and ecclesiological imperative for the Catholic Church in the Philippines to accompany the growing demographic of Filipino Nones who, just like anybody else, were created with dignity, identity and God's intimate knowledge.

Drawing on Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit*, particularly Article 235, the study reaffirms the thesis that the Church's mandate to accompany these Nones emanates from their inherent place in the heart of God and the heart of the Church, calling for an inclusive, non-proselytizing evangelization that fosters belonging and transformative encounters with the living God. This is indeed a mission, a call and a vocation especially for young people.

Through a systematic document review and thematic analysis, the research has identified three essential identities among Filipino Nones: Reflexive Spirituality, characterized by introspective, self-directed meaning-making rooted in cultural ethics; Spiritual Bricolage, a syncretic blending of Catholic, indigenous, and global elements reflecting the Philippines' pluralistic heritage; and the Pilgrim-Seeker ethos, an exploratory journey toward transcendence amid globalization and institutional skepticism. These identities distinguish Filipino Nones from their Western counterparts, highlighting their retention of cultural Catholicism even as they are into disaffiliation driven by historical grievances, perceived irrelevance, and the allure of autonomous spirituality. Accompanying them entails an emphasis on inclusivity, belonging, self-critique, and becoming daring without proselytizing.

The proposed heuristic framework, anchored in *Christus Vivit* 235, integrates Theological Conversation—emphasizing presence, listening, and dialogue—and Healthy Pastoral Restlessness, a dynamic impulse toward synodal, contextual, and missionary approaches. This framework attempts to address the tensions of being "daring without presumption and proselytizing," urging the Church to transcend "closed environments" and embrace a "healthy pastoral restlessness" that mirrors God's incarnational presence.

Theologically grounded in Trinitarian communion, biblical foundations of accompaniment (e.g., Emmaus journey, Lk 24:13-35), and patristic teachings, it reimagines evangelization as relational solidarity rather than coercive conversion, aligning with Vatican II's vision of the Church as the People of God and its openness to diverse paths of truth-seeking.

The insights from this study reveal the Filipino Nones not as a challenge to be overcome but as a prophetic gift, inviting the Church to self-critique and renewal.

Their spiritual vitality underscores the need for pastoral practices that prioritize cultural relevance, such as inclusive parish dialogues, experiential immersions blending indigenous traditions with Gospel values, and digital platforms for reflexive exploration.

Ecclesialogically, this demands a synodal Church where the Nones' voices shape decision-making, fostering shared humanity and countering alienation in a Catholic-majority nation.

The implications extend beyond the Philippines, offering a model for global youth ministry amid rising disaffiliation. For theological reflection, it challenges rigid dichotomies between institutional faith and individualized spirituality, encouraging dialogues that integrate Nones' bricolage with Christian truths. Future research may empirically evaluate these approaches through longitudinal studies on Nones' engagement, comparative analyses with other Catholic contexts, and assessments of digital tools for accompaniment.

Ultimately, by making room for the Filipino Nones, the Church fulfills its mission as a field hospital (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 49), healing wounds of exclusion and rediscovering its youthful dynamism. In walking with them—without presumption or proselytism—the Church not only accompanies these seekers toward human flourishing but also renews itself, becoming a vibrant witness to God's boundless love in a world of flux. As Pope Francis reminds us, "All young people, without exception, have the right to be guided in life's journey" (*Christus Vivit*, 234).

Acknowledgment

Gratitude is offered to Almighty God for boundless grace and steadfast guidance, through which this academic journey was sustained and the completion of this paper was made possible. Deep appreciation is extended to the research adviser for expert guidance, scholarly insight, and unwavering support.

Conflict of Interest Statement

This paper was conducted with academic integrity and theological inquiry. No financial conflicts of interest are declared. No honoraria, grants, consultancy fees, employment relationships, stock ownership, or other financial support were received from any organization or entity that could have influenced the study. A Filipino Catholic ecclesial perspective is acknowledged as the theological lens of the paper. However, scholarly objectivity, fairness in the presentation of data, and fidelity to the sources examined were observed. No non-financial, institutional, professional, or personal conflicts exist that could reasonably compromise the impartiality of the research and its conclusions.

References

- Barron, R. (2023). When did “conversion” become a dirty word? Word on Fire.
<https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/barron/when-did-conversion-become-a-dirty-word/>
- Coggiatti, M. (2023). When evangelizers proselytize: Ivereigh responds to Bishop Barron. Where Peter Is.
<https://wherepeteris.com/when-evangelizers-proselytize-ivereigh-responds-to-bishop-barron/>
- Cornelio, J. S., & Salera, J. (2020). Digital religion and Filipino youth. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 68(4), 434. <https://doi.org/10.1353/phs.2020.0012>
- Cornelio, J. S. (2011). *Being Catholic as reflexive spirituality: The case of religiously involved Filipino students* (Asia Research Institute Working Paper No. 146). Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1743931>
- Cornelio, J. S. (2016). *Being Catholic in the contemporary Philippines: Young people reinterpreting religion*. Routledge.
https://www.academia.edu/download/54801190/Being_Catholic_in_the_Contemporary_Philippines_-_Young_People_Reinterpreting_Religion.1_2.pdf
- Enriquez, V. (2013). From colonial to liberation psychology: The Philippine experience. *Philosophy East and West*, 63(2). <https://philpapers.org/rec/ENRFCT>
- Francis. (2019). *Christus vivit: Post-synodal apostolic exhortation to young people and to the entire people of God*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html
- Fuller, R. C. (2001). *Spiritual, but not religious: Understanding unchurched America*. New York: Oxford University Press. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=T--S0L-EC2EC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Fuller,+R.+C.+\(2001\).+Spiritual,+but+not+religious:+Understanding+unchurched+America.+Oxford+University+Press.&ots=YLsa6b6e0A&sig=PNX6QYKcvbQzRzzOMUlr7LFoB-E](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=T--S0L-EC2EC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Fuller,+R.+C.+(2001).+Spiritual,+but+not+religious:+Understanding+unchurched+America.+Oxford+University+Press.&ots=YLsa6b6e0A&sig=PNX6QYKcvbQzRzzOMUlr7LFoB-E)
- Lipka, M. (2015). 5 facts about Catholicism in the Philippines. Pew Research Center.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/01/09/5-facts-about-catholicism-in-the-philippines/>
- Mercadante, L. A. (2014). *Belief without borders: Inside the minds of the spiritual but not religious*. Oxford University Press.
[https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=dkWkAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Mercadante,+L.+A.+\(2014\).+Belief+without+borders:+Inside+the+minds+of+the+spiritual+but+not+religious.+Oxford+University+Press.&ots=hFcqC-R68V&sig=zBBpzNbvCVWrCAqBMAActHij2wY](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=dkWkAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Mercadante,+L.+A.+(2014).+Belief+without+borders:+Inside+the+minds+of+the+spiritual+but+not+religious.+Oxford+University+Press.&ots=hFcqC-R68V&sig=zBBpzNbvCVWrCAqBMAActHij2wY)
- McCarthy, R. J., & Vitek, J. M. (2018). Going, going, gone: The dynamics of disaffiliation in young Catholics. Saint Mary's Press.
https://read.nxtbook.com/ncea/momentum/2018_fall/going_going_gone_the_dynamics.html
- Pew Research Center. (2015). America's changing religious landscape.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

- Pew Research Center. (2015, April 2). *The future of world religions: Population growth projections, 2010–2050*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>
- Pew Research Center. (2024, January 24). *Religious nones in America: Who they are and what they believe*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe>
- Philippine Statistics Authority. (2023, February 22). *Religious affiliation in the Philippines (2020 Census of Population and Housing)*. <https://psa.gov.ph/content/religious-affiliation-philippines-2020-census-population-and-housing>
- Reyes, R. (2023). Sharing Christ with Young Urban Nones in Metro Manila. *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 19(2), 126-147. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1548&context=jams>
- Rice, B. (2019). Christus vivit: A new vision of youth and young adult ministry. *Catechetical Review*, 6(1), 34–35. <https://review.catechetics.com>
- Silva, W. (2023). Portuguese cardinal-designate on World Youth Day: No converts. The Catholic Thing. <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2023/07/12/portuguese-cardinal-designate-on-world-youth-day-no-converts/>
- Smith, C., & Denton, M. L. (2009). *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. Oxford University Press. <https://ministryarchitects.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Youth-Ministry-Studies-2005.pdf>
- Synod of Bishops, (2018). Synod of Bishops. Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20181027_doc-final-instrumentum-xvassemblea-giovani_en.html
- SWS, (2020). Record-High 83% of Adult Filipinos Say Religion Is “Very Important” (Quezon City: SWS, April 12, 2020), <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1257504/record-high-83-of-filipinos-say-religion-very-important-sws>
- Taylor, C. (2007). A Secular Age. Reviewed by Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. University of Notre Dame. <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/a-secular-age/>
- The Bible Project. (2023). The meaning of “listen” in Hebrew. PursueGOD. <https://www.pursuegod.org/hebrew-word-study-shema/>
-

Author Contributions: Tampe, J.; Study design, method conception, data collection, data analysis and manuscript writing.