

We Have to Keep Up Our Hope!

Shortly after the captivity of our Sister Gilberte Bussièrè, Fathers Gianonio Alegri and Giampaolo Marta, I was speaking with Sister Gilberte's 97 year old mother. In my head and heart, I was trying to encourage and to support her, to listen to her fears and to assure her of our prayer and our accompaniment during those days of the unknown. In the midst of our conversation, Mme Bussièrè said to me: *Well, we have to keep up our hope!* I was taken aback to hear these words from a mother whose daughter might well be dead! My heart was moved. She gave *me* hope.

This simple, loving comment embodied the mission of our Congregation Leadership and Administration during those challenging days. *We have to keep up our hope!* In other words, we needed to hold on to God; we needed to hold on to one another.

How Did We Attempt to Do this?

First of all, we beseeched God to listen to our prayer. We prayed and we asked others to pray. We tried to search deep into the roots of our charism and to find there the wisdom, the strength, the courage and the hope to take the next steps, even when there seemed to be no steps to be taken. We needed to communicate hope and trust to the Congregation sisters and associates, to our families, friends and collaborators even when we had no news to communicate.

With simplicity and humility, we asked for help when it was possible; we collaborated with others who had more information than we did and who could not share it with us; we tried to maintain relationships of trust with all involved. In this world of mystery and grace, we had to believe that God was always doing something more. We had to keep up our hope!

A Changing Era

Not all the challenges facing Congregation leadership in this era are as public and dramatic as this one, but, perhaps the experience exemplifies some of those that Congregation leaders face today. Our world is moving in increasing complexity and greater consciousness. As Pope Francis has noted, *we are living not in an era of change but in a changing era*¹!

In the midst of this fast-paced, individualistic society, Congregation leaders strive to dig deeply into their roots to reframe their particular charisms in a manner that responds to the present needs of the Church, of society and of the cosmos. They do this respectfully and courageously in the light of their particular reality with regard to demographics, financial resources and administrative needs. They do this through contemplative practice, empathic listening and creative imagination that enable them to envision what does not exist and to invite it to take form.

Embracing the Opposites

Herein lie other significant challenges for our day. How do we continue to foster the mission of the Congregation and to participate meaningfully and appropriately in global issues of peace, justice and care for our common home? How do we promote unity in the midst of the rich diversity that is ours? Interculturality and intergenerationality are significant elements of our leadership.

¹ At Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on July 27, 2013, on the occasion of the World Youth Day.

We experience diversity in age, health, culture, language, experiences, personalities, talents and interests. How do we assure that everyone has a voice and that her/his voice is heard? How do we balance the common good with individual needs? How do we encourage the hopes and desires of our newer members and allow new life to emerge while being present and caring of those who have given their lives to the mission? How do we support those who are unable to change or who do not wish to? Advances in technology can improve the circulation of information, interconnectedness and a sense of shared participation. Yet, not everyone has the same level of expertise or access to the devices and their functioning.

In the midst of ambiguity, conflict and newness, can we embrace the opposites and live in creative tension as peaceful, loving, faith-filled and hope-filled people?

Journeying with Others

Indeed, Congregation leaders are not alone on this journey. *The group gathered is the great grace*, said George Aschenbrenner, SJ, many years ago. We pray and serve with other team members who share wisdom, grace and responsibility. Community-building, forming a *we*, promoting conversations of the heart, visioning together and taking bold initiatives to prepare for the future are all challenges we meet regularly.

We collaborate with associates, other religious communities and groups with similar interests. We take measures to be faithful to the Church while questioning some of its practices. Compassion, mercy, tenderness, transparency and trust are our companions. But we are human and sometimes we are tired!

Indeed, Congregation leaders face many questions and the answers are often illusive. But Jesus, the Christ, is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We believe that God is always doing something more and all we need to do is *keep up our hope!*

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