



**Mission Leadership in Challenging Times**  
**Atlantic-Midwest Province Annual Leadership Meeting**  
**Sponsored and Co-Sponsored Ministries**  
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## Introduction

Good afternoon! I am very grateful for the privilege of being with you for this gathering of leaders of sponsored and co-sponsored ministries of our Atlantic-Midwest Province. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to explore and reflect together on: ***Mission Leadership in Challenging Times***. In doing this, we can find and strengthen ways of supporting one another in the ministry of leadership entrusted to us and of being a prophetic presence and voice needed in our times.

## Our Challenging Times

Your theme holds out a strong call to each of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, where already we have begun another decade, overflowing with challenge and opportunity. How might we describe and understand the challenging times in which we live?

I believe these are extraordinary and rapidly changing times. Frequently, Pope Francis has noted that what we are experiencing is “not merely an era of change, but a change of eras.” We find ourselves living in times when change is no longer linear. Rather it is evolving and expanding, impacting “decisions that rapidly transform our ways of living, of relating to one another, of communicating and thinking, of how different generations relate to one another and how we understand and experience faith and science.”<sup>1</sup>

Our world is more complex and interconnected than ever before. We observe both amazing gains and urgent crises brought about by the fast, complex changes, advances in science and technology, and the phenomenon of globalization. Honduran Jesuit Father Ismael Moreno (known as Padre Melo) wrote recently, “We find ourselves in a complex century, with a technology that brings us closer to all the peoples of the earth, but with a system driven by capitalism (capital) that separates us, confronts us, sinks us into polarization, preys on Mother Nature, and demands ... a prophetic voice for these turbulent times.”<sup>2</sup>

Not only are these challenging times, they are turbulent times. They raise serious, old and new questions about our very identity, which we must acknowledge and address. Connected

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Roman Curia, Clementine Hall, 21 December 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ismael Moreno, SJ, [Ecos del Congreso SJES: mis impresiones](#), 09 Diciembre 2019.



across borders and continents as never before, we have become citizens of the world; and our identity is global, planetary.

In this new relationship, we experience both advantages and disadvantages of globalization. It makes possible access to information, knowledge, and a wide range of resources, even food, from nearly every part of the world. At the same time, it allows fake news and misinformation to travel the globe, reaching even the smallest villages. It contributes to a range of criminal activity, including human trafficking and illegal financial transactions, and to the spread of disease and dis-ease.

With all the connectedness, we experience deep divisions. Our world is marked increasingly by hatred, brutality, violent conflict, and growing disparities in economic, political and social power. Padre Melo further reflected, “The world is sinking into technological distractions and a globalization of the concentration of wealth and a massive distribution of human distress.”<sup>3</sup>

Each of us, I’m sure, can think of experiences that reflect this reality. I have lived in places where individual and corporate wealth astounds me, and in that very same place, the hunger of street children tears at my heart. I have worked among peoples, struggling to survive for decades in refugee camps in the middle of forests in Tanzania and of deserts in Chad and Darfur, Sudan. There they wait, longing for security, peace, and the possibility to go home one day.

These realities only fuel more conflict and endless wars. Currently, the world is in the midst of the largest refugee crisis since World War II. In 2019, an unprecedented 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, with 37,000 forced to flee their homes every day due to conflict or persecution.<sup>4</sup> Around the world, from Honduras to Venezuela, from South Sudan to Syria, millions of our sisters and brothers have been uprooted by violent conflict, poverty, environmental devastation, and climate change.

Tensions between nuclear-armed countries are on the rise, with the threat of nuclear war becoming more real each day. Reports of the growing drug abuse, the breakdown of families and societies, and the loss of a sense of purpose and meaning in life abound. Climate change and shrinking biodiversity, melting glaciers and raging fires threaten our lives and Earth home as never before. We are challenged to face this truth.

In *Laudato Si’* Pope Francis observed

that our common home is falling into serious disrepair... we can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation; these are evident in large-scale natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises, for the world’s problems cannot be analyzed or explained in isolation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> cf. World Refugee Day 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/world-refugee-day-2019>.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 61.



In our church, as well, many are experiencing a crisis of credibility brought on by the extensive sexual abuse, financial mismanagement, and questions about participation and use of power. We see that “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with earth itself... these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us.”<sup>6</sup>

Absolutely everything is interconnected. Yet there is a growing sense of disconnection and indifference. Our lives are filled with the unexpected, and much around us seems to trigger fear, anxiety, discouragement, powerlessness and hopelessness. With all the planning that we do, we know that we cannot manage or fix everything, and worry will change nothing.

At times we may feel that these realities are far beyond our comprehension and even imagination. But they involve us. They touch every aspect of our lives and challenge us, our communities, our ministries and institutions, our congregation and church.

Through the dialogue and discernment at our 24<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, we School Sisters of Notre Dame acknowledged these challenging times, recognizing that we are at a “critical turning point in the sacred history of creation and humanity.”<sup>7</sup> Painfully aware of the deep divisions and wounds of our world, we feel within us a sense of urgency. Being at this critical turning point is not only about the world out there. It is about us. It affects us, and most importantly, it challenges us to confront ourselves and all that we are about, particularly with the call and the demands of the Gospel.

Being at a critical turning point is where we recognize crises as well as the possibilities for transformation and new life. Crises can impel us, Pope Benedict XVI wrote,

... to redesign our path, to give ourselves new rules and to find new forms of involvement, to focus on positive experiences and reject the negative ones. The crisis thus becomes an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future. From the viewpoint that is trustful rather than resigned, can one better face the difficulties of the present moment.<sup>8</sup>

Confronting these difficult realities can feel overwhelming at times, but we are not without hope. In us, we claim, is the “deep desire to trust and dare.”<sup>9</sup> Within us are new seeds of God’s hope for our world.

These are critical times, and this Now is sacred. No matter how limited and imperfect our situations, our choices and actions; God is present, creating, mysteriously bringing about good, and nurturing new life with new possibilities. Our challenging times call us; they cry out to us for a response.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>7</sup> Love Gives Everything, Directional Statement, 24<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, October 24, 2017

<sup>8</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Love Gives Everything*.



## ***What realities today cry out to us for a response?***

### **Living Mission Today**

Our church and world suffer many ills. We see and touch the wounds, hear the cries, feel the pain, and sense the urgency for a more dynamic and bold response. Mission is about responding to what God's world needs. For this we are called and sent. These challenging times, these realities cry out for a prophetic, Gospel response.

At baptism we were anointed to be prophets to one another and to the world. As we strive each day to be and live as a follower of Christ, we come to share in his prophetic mission. Jesus entire life was an act of love for the life of the world. This we know from the Gospel of John; this was why Jesus was sent. "God so loved the world that God sent the only Son"<sup>10</sup>... so all may have life, life to the full, and that all may be one in God.<sup>11</sup>

We too have been called and sent for this prophetic mission, to bring all to oneness with God.<sup>12</sup> We are called and sent to echo the voice of God in the heart of the world, to reveal God's love, to bear witness to hope. The way we participate in this prophetic mission flows from and is shaped by the charism.

Although we often refer to charism and mission as 'ours' or that of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, we are not owners of the charism or of the mission. The mission is God's to which we are called through baptism to share and participate in. The charism is the Spirit's gift entrusted to us that is to be incarnated, lived, made fruitful for the good of all. I like what Pope Francis said, "The charism is not a bottle of distilled water. It must be lived energetically, reinterpreting it culturally as well."<sup>13</sup>

Our life in mission is the way we embody the charism needed in our times. Ministry, our particular ministries are meant to give expression to the mission of God (Missio Dei) as a response to what God's world needs now.

For God's mission, we have been gifted by the Spirit with a charism that was embodied in our Blessed Mother M. Theresa Gerhardinger. We have come to understand and describe this as longing for oneness of all in God that engages us in the striving and struggle for unity.

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<sup>10</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. John 10:10; 17:21.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *You Are Sent*, C 4, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in *Keep Watch*, CICLSAL, 8 September 2014, 15; from A. Spadaro, "Svegliate il mondo!" Conversation of Pope Francis with superiors general, in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 165 (2014/I), 8.



In our Constitution, *You Are Sent*, we acknowledge that “Our charism continues to develop in the living community... to unfold in the present and to be challenged by the future.”<sup>14</sup> Now, in these times, we must set in motion the newness of life that is present in the charism for the life of our world.<sup>15</sup> The response needs to be bold, creative, practical, and prophetic. As Padre Melo said, “this twenty-first century cries out for a prophetic spark.”<sup>16</sup>

Some of us may be uncomfortable with the idea of our being prophetic. Yet a number of religious leaders and spiritual writers have been impelled to speak of this, and they offer valuable insight as well as significant challenge about what being prophetic involves.

Prophets do not predict the future; they simply speak the truth. They do so by proclaiming the word in their lives, with their lips, and with their actions. Saint Pope John Paul II wrote, “True prophecy is born of God, from friendship with God, from attentive listening to God’s word in the different circumstances of history.”<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis has said, “This is the priority that is needed right now: ‘to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth’.”<sup>18</sup>

An authentic prophetic witness both criticizes what is wrong and unjust and energizes with a hope-filled vision of what is new and of God. It is meant “to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominate culture around us.”<sup>19</sup>

Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. warned, “If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.”<sup>20</sup> This challenges all of us to take a look at our lives and evaluate the relevance, quality, and credibility of the practice and witness of faith in our lives and in the lives of our communities, ministries, and institutions in these times.

An authentic, prophetic response of faith sparks new life. It empowers individuals and communities to create new pathways to respond to the challenges of our times. These ways are rooted not in fear, but in possibility. They are grounded in justice and peace and strengthened in the truth of communion, of the oneness of all in God.

The reflections of Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister about congregations being prophetic are insightful and seem relevant for our reflections here as leaders of our sponsored and co-sponsored ministries and institutions. She wrote:

The prophetic congregation is a congregation that ‘as a congregation’ stands for something... They have a particular focus and it is that focus of

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<sup>14</sup> *You Are Sent*, Prologue.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Economy at the Service of the Charism and Mission*, CICLSAL, 2018, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ismael Moreno, SJ.

<sup>17</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 1996, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, Year of Consecrated Life, 21 November 2014, II, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, (Second Edition), Fortress Press, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Knock at Midnight*, June 11, 1967.



the congregation as a whole that enables the congregation to speak with a prophetic voice... if you want the congregation itself to have ultimate impact, the members have to know how they are practicing their charism as a group... The message of a prophetic congregation must be a conscious articulation of the truth that this culture needs at this time, on this issue.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to ask ourselves: for what do we stand. For what do our ministries, our communities, our province and congregation stand? How are we living the charism entrusted to us in a way that speaks the truth needed in our world today, in these challenging times? In the words of American Poet Clarissa Pinkola Estes: “One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul.”<sup>22</sup> Your soul ... our soul; what we stand for.

Considering the dominate culture around us—one of division and disparity, fear and hatred—and claiming our desire to respond to the signs of the times in light of the Gospel, it seems vital that we discern new ways of living the charism and being in mission. We School Sisters commit ourselves to this, “to minister more consciously out of a prophetic global vision of all humanity united in Christ.”<sup>23</sup>

### ***What prophetic witness is required of us in our world today?***

#### **Mission Leadership**

Our leadership, “mission leadership,” needs to facilitate and support prophetic witness of Gospel choices needed in our world today.

I think it is evident that this kind of leadership is about much more than good administration or management of a ministry, a project, an institution. It is about serving something, someone much larger and greater than ourselves, than the ministry or institution, than the School Sisters of Notre Dame. It is about God’s work for the world. As our Blessed M. Theresa wrote, “We must all responsibly cherish God’s work.”<sup>24</sup>

A danger in these challenging times is that we become bewildered and overwhelmed, discouraged and paralyzed, and just give up. Another great danger is that we become disconnected from our very identity and calling. We may find ourselves and our colleagues and partners in ministry just going through the motion of doing the job, of just trying to keep up with all the demands and expectations that are placed upon us and them. Within this

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<sup>21</sup> Joan Chittister, OSB, “The Power and Potential of Prophetic Communities,” *Transformation Leadership: Conversations with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious*, ed. by Annmarie Sanders, IHM, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estes, “We Were Made for These Times,” [www.grahameb.com/pinkola\\_estes.htm](http://www.grahameb.com/pinkola_estes.htm).

<sup>23</sup> *You Are Sent*, GD 114c.

<sup>24</sup> Blessed Mother M. Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, Trust and Dare, October 13, 5025.



dynamic, we can lose the true sense of who we are and become disconnected from what God is asking of us and calling us to be and to do.

As we grow and expand our understanding and experience of God and God's mission and of who we are to be in this mission, we are more prepared as leaders to facilitate and support the journey of others, of those who participate with us in this work and in our ministries. I wish to suggest three dimensions of mission leadership, which seem important for our times and may give some focus.

### ➤ **Leading for Transformation**

Mission leadership requires us to have critical awareness of the reality and of the impact of this reality—of global forces on the social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual environment of our times. With this understanding and with the role and responsibilities we have, I believe we are called to facilitate transformation.

**Transformation** is important to us School Sisters. We speak of it often and believe that it is essential in mission. We say that “we are sent in the power of the Spirit to continue Christ's mission, to proclaim him, to be transformed and to transform our world” and that we “educate with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons.”<sup>25</sup>

How do we understand the word, the dynamic and process of transformation? Though we may speak of it often, it is not something to take for granted or to assume that it is happening or that it is always good or positive. [For example, some forms of education can be quite disempowering, divisive, militaristic.]

Transformation is complex and a word used in varied ways. My own understanding continues to evolve, and I offer a few thoughts.

- ~ Transformation is a change, but the kind of change in one aspect of one's life that creates a fundamental shift in the whole of one's life: in how one is in the world, how one sees the world, how one engages in the world.
- ~ Transformation is more of a process than a state or something that can be achieved. It is like grace, a gift that is offered and can only be received. What we can do is nurture openness and attentiveness so when the grace is offered, we are ready and able to receive and cooperate with the grace and the process that it initiates. This is important for us as leaders to discover ways to nurture such openness within ourselves and others.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., C 48, 22.



- ~ Transformation, while often thought of as a personal process, is not something that happens in isolation. The process of real personal transformation is intertwined and interrelated with communal and global transformations. The three will evolve together, or there is no real transformation. There may be a change but not transformation.
- ~ Authentic transformation is a matter of the heart, a process and spirituality that will take us to the heart: to understanding the heart of our reality, to exploring the human heart, and to discovering the heart of God. Transformation, at whatever level, begins with and is accompanied by transformation of the heart, the greatest of challenges. Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, said it well. “The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?”<sup>26</sup>
- ~ Experience suggests that great love and great suffering are natural openings to transformation. Contemplation prepares us for when great love and great suffering come our way.

**Contemplative practice** is invaluable for facilitating and creating space for transformation. Contemplation awakens us to reality, to see in new ways what may be thought of as ordinary, everyday experiences. Taking a long, loving look at the real lets what is invisible become visible and helps us discern what is truly important and what is ours to do. It brings us to see others and our world with the mind and heart of God.

Contemplation can free us from becoming overwhelmed by our trying to do and fix everything all at once. It will draw us into greater awareness of our own participation in the problems of our times. We come to realize that we are part of the problem, but we are not the whole of it. Our lives and actions, our work and engagement with others are essential to addressing the problems and working with the challenges before us.

Contemplation provides silence and space for us to reflect upon and to experience our experiences. Then experiences become much more than a nice collection; they become grace with the power to transform.

Contemplation opens us for transformation and unlocks our prophetic capacity. We grow into having clear and far-seeing eyes, common-sense faith, loving energy and passion, humility and hope, and the ability to deal with complex issues with courage, simplicity, and honesty.

In recent times, communal contemplation, what some refer to as ‘we-mysticism,’ is being encouraged. This seems to facilitate our touching into the spiritual energy at a depth of our interrelatedness and of universal consciousness of oneness that is transformative.

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<sup>26</sup> Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 1963.





This dimension of mission leadership—of leading for transformation—makes it possible for us to connect the richness and strength of our inner world and that of others with the significant challenges of our times. The life of Jesus gives us some examples of this. We might think of Mary at the wedding feast at Cana, when she tells Jesus that they had run out of wine. In that encounter, Mary calls forth her son to respond to an immediate need and, in so doing, to embrace his true identity and mission. We can consider how Jesus worked with his disciples. There is Peter. Despite all the mistakes he made, Jesus recognizes the gift, the potential of his life in God, and invites him to follow, to love, and to lead.

Contemplation opens us to greater consciousness of the truth of our identity and to begin to see and to love persons as God does. Then we are able to call forth the gifts, the potential, what God is already doing in our lives and the lives of others. The space for transformation opens.

### ***What will facilitate or support our leading for transformation?***

#### **➤ Fostering Communion**

Being engaged in mission leadership in today's world calls for another essential dimension also vitally important to School Sisters, that of deepening communion. In our Constitution, *You Are Sent*, we state: "We are called and sent to deepen communion with God and among people wherever we are – in every place, in every time, in every situation... our striving for unity embraces all humanity and the whole of creation."<sup>27</sup>

With the polarization and divisions in our world, deepening communion is a great need and at times may seem an impossible endeavor. Yet the call is to bring all to oneness.<sup>28</sup> In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis noted, "As Christians, we are ... called 'to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbors on a global scale...'"<sup>29</sup>

Contemplative practice will facilitate this as well and lead us to honor difference and to realize that our identities are much more than nationality, culture, race, gender, or other descriptive labels. We come to know our true selves, who we are in God. In coming to greater consciousness of this truth of our identity, we realize our fundamental unity; the love of the Triune God has joined all creatures in a splendid universal communion.<sup>30</sup>

To give prophetic witness of unity in diversity, of a universal communion requires us to embrace a culture of encounter. Pope Francis speaks frequently of a culture of encounter as a goal for society that facilitates right relationships. Genuine encounters bring persons and communities together—to new levels of understanding and acceptance, of building trust and

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<sup>27</sup> *You Are Sent*, C 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, C 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Laudato Si'*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 76, 220.



nurturing compassion, of living solidarity. An authentic encounter enables us to “grow in communion with God and with one another ... itself a witness in our interdependent world.”<sup>31</sup>

One area of growth that seems greatly needed today is to be able to recognize the limitations of our consciousness, the sense of “Us,” the who included in our encounters and relationships. According to social psychologist and theologian Christena Cleveland, “a primary problem is that our identities are too small. We tend to rely most on our smaller cultural identities and ignore the larger, common identity as members of the body of Christ.”<sup>32</sup>

God cannot be contained in any one people, place, or tradition. A call for us, then, is to go beyond the comfort zones of our lives, just as Jesus went beyond his, and to cross borders of all kinds: geographical, international, cultural, and especially those marking privilege, inclusion, and safety—often with invisible boundaries and walls.

In her book *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart*, Christena Cleveland raises some poignant questions for us in regard to this dimension of mission. She wrote,

People can *meet* God within their cultural context but in order to *follow* God, they must cross into other cultures because that is what Jesus did in the incarnation and on the cross. Discipleship is cross-cultural. When we meet Jesus around people who are just like us and then continue to follow Jesus with people who are just like us, we stifle growth in Christ and open ourselves up to a world of division. However, when we’re rubbing elbows in Christian fellowship with people who are different from us, we can learn from each other and grow more like Christ.<sup>33</sup>

From a culture of encounter evolves the call to live mission interculturally. A commitment to do this must go beyond reading and study, activities and exercises, and developing a set of skills. It moves us to a radical and universal inclusivity, beginning with ourselves and our local faith and ministerial communities, and extending to our world and Earth community.

Engaging in mutual, intercultural encounters with the other is a prophetic act in today’s divided and fragmented world. With the charism and mission entrusted to us School Sisters, colleagues, and partners in mission, we need to be at the frontiers in this: to cross borders, to live beyond and without boundaries, and to witness in the in-between places what God envisions for all—communion.

Being in communion is the way to truth. With the Triune God, we begin to see with the eye of love for the most accurate sight and depth of understanding. As we struggle with difference and strive to embrace the call to live mission interculturally, the Triune God reveals

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<sup>31</sup> *You Are Sent*, C 25.

<sup>32</sup> Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart*, Intervarsity Press; 2013.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



how we can do this. Diversity reflects God, who is love and who loves and celebrates “unity in diversity” through our amazing universe, our province and congregation, our local communities and ministries. Communion is God’s mission.

Mission leadership then calls for a commitment to foster and deepen communion in every encounter, activity, and ministry. When hearts are authentically open to universal communion, nothing and no one is excluded.<sup>34</sup>

### ***How can we encourage encounters that foster communion?***

#### **➤ Witnessing Hope**

Another key dimension of mission leadership is that of witnessing hope. Hope is the gift of communion, the result—the grace of encounters of solidarity that heal and deepen communion.<sup>35</sup>

More than two decades ago, when I worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Africa, some powerful, humbling experiences brought me to this understanding of hope, real hope; not optimism, but hope.

For two years I served in pastoral ministry with several thousand Burundian refugees in camps hidden away in Tanzanian forests. It was an incredible experience for me, though often painful—to be with those who fear and suffer and gradually come to receive and share their suffering. Often, we talked about what gives hope: the presence we offer each other, the courage and resilience of those who suffer, things we do through our projects, education, and other opportunities. All of these helped to give hope, to keep hope alive; and I learned that hope is more.

A person I came to know quite well in a refugee camp in Tanzania was Nathaniel, as he shared about his 30 years of being a refugee. From the time he was about 17, he had lived in difficult situations and isolated camps, having fled from home because of war, and again from the first country of asylum, when it went to war. He spoke of the bitterness of refugee life, of the suffering—the separation from family, inadequate food and frequent illness, and an uncertain future. Yet, married with a lovely wife and several children, his life was about service. Being a catechist and librarian in the camp and frequently my interpreter, he was happy to bring joy to other refugees in what he could do and share.

One time I asked him about hope. He paused a moment, then spoke so simply. “For a Christian there is always hope.” And then he added, “God knows when I will go home again.” Some weeks later, his ninth child was born and named Victorina Christina Nyibigizi—the

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 92.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Teresa Maya, CCVI, “A Vision for the Future of Religious Life,” UISG Plenary Assembly, 2019.



traditional name meaning “God knows.” For Nathaniel, it was enough that God knew. He was a witness of hope to me, his family, and many in that camp.

While hope does not remove pain and suffering, true hope—God’s gift of hope—revealed in moments of solidarity and authentic encounters of communion, brings forth new life. Pope Francis, in this year’s Message for the World Day of Peace describes such hope.

... memory is the horizon of hope. Many times, in the darkness of wars and conflicts, the remembrance of even a small gesture of solidarity received can lead to courageous and even heroic decisions. It can unleash new energies and kindle new hope in individuals and communities.<sup>36</sup>

Hope keeps us going, moving forward when obstacles seem insurmountable and the journey daunting. There can be no despair, only hope when we remember why we are here, who we serve, and who sent us. “Only hope enables us to walk the road of life, only hope makes us capable of the future.”<sup>37</sup>

We are called and sent to bear witness to hope. “To find hope we need to be prophetic, and to be prophetic, our lives need to witness to what we believe and who we are.”<sup>38</sup> At baptism each of us was called and sent, anointed to be prophet to one another and to the world, ever witnessing hope.

## Conclusion

Last month for the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, I received an encouraging email and the gift of a poem from our Sister Lillia Langreck of the Central Pacific Province. In her email, she shared of her belief that the baptismal commitment was a reminder to us of what we were called to be from the first moment of our existence. I conclude by sharing part of her poem, ***Come to the Waters.***

...  
*I savor the message.  
And then the call:  
“Go with Jesus, my beloved Son.  
Yes, go, you are sent!  
Bring my love to your little world  
On the shores of your troubled times.  
Let my gift of love  
Spill over a reluctant world  
A world steeped in hate and fear.*

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<sup>36</sup> Pope Francis, “Peace as a Journey of Hope: Dialogue, Reconciliation and Ecological Conversion,” Message for the 53rd World Day of Peace, 1 January 2020, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis, Address to General Chapter of Sister Disciples of Divine Master, May 22, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Teresa Maya, CCVI.



*Let it heal and strengthen  
And make whole again.  
Let it bring together a people divided  
Till my longing for all to be one  
Is realized in your now-time  
And your world comes to know  
Peace and harmony again.”<sup>39</sup>*

**Questions for reflection/sharing**

- ~ How as leaders can we bear prophetic witness in these challenging times?
- ~ How can we reframe difficult realities to shape a new vision for the future?
- ~ What are signs of hope growing within us and our ministries?

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<sup>39</sup> Lillia Langreck, SSND, “Come to the Waters,” Central Pacific Province, Elm Grove, Wisconsin.