



Sowers of Prophetic Hope
Seminatrici di speranza profetica
Säerinnen Prophetischer Hoffnung
Sembradoras de esperanza profética
Semeuses d'espérance prophétique
Semeadoras de esperança profética

MAY 2019 UISG PLENARY ASSEMBLY

Wednesday May 8 Afternoon Panel Seeds of Hope

Seeds of Hope from the 2018 Synod on Youth Sister Sally M. Hodgdon, CSJ

Good Afternoon. I was privileged to be one of the three sisters from UISG invited to participate as auditors in the 2018 Synod on Youth. The other two were young sisters, Sister Mina Kwon, a Sister of St Paul di Chartres from Korea and Sister Lucy Nderi, a Salesian from Kenya, both of whom work with youth. We worked closely with 2 other auditors, Sister Alessandra Smerilli, a Salesian from Italy and Sister Nathalie Becquart from France.

“Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment” was the theme of the Synod.

In January 2017, when Pope Francis **announced** that there would be a Synod on Youth, he directed his comments to Youth saying, “I wanted you to be the centre of attention. ...A better world can be built as a result of your efforts, your desire to change and your generosity...make your voice heard, let it resound in communities and let it be heard by your shepherds of souls”. This proclamation became a reality through the process of preparation and throughout the Synod in October. In fact, it was a joy to hear the voices of the 35 youth participants, resounding daily in the Synod Hall. Certainly, it was a new experience for those walls!

The Synod on Youth was intended to be an experience of synodality, in which the members listened to the truth of the lived reality of young people in our Church today through the voices of the youth, not only through sociological studies. The young people shared their life experiences, dreams and questions; their search for how best to follow Jesus; or how to encounter God in a real way.

The **methodology** used included meetings in large Assemblies in the Synod Hall where everyone, whether a delegate or an auditor, was given four minutes to share their reflection on topics within the working papers. We participated in small work groups consisting of a mixture of delegates and auditors. It was in these small groups where we, the sisters and youth, as non-voting participants, had a great impact.

The two published documents from the Synod are the Final Document, voted and approved by the Synod on October 27, 2018 and “Christus vivit” or Christ Alive, Pope Francis’ post synod Apostolic Exhortation. Pope Francis includes much of the Final Document in his Exhortation. If

you have not already read this or the Final Document, I encourage you to do so. They are very good.

My experience of the Youth Synod was truly a grace as I saw the Spirit move among all of us, youth, sisters, priests, bishops, cardinals, opening our hearts to new perspectives and new hope. I would like to share with you Four Seeds of Hope I saw emerging from this Synod.

The first seed of hope is that of attentive listening. I saw a new paradigm developing in the process used by those planning this Synod, a process that emphasized **listening** as the main preparation. For two years prior to the Synod, through gatherings of youth, ages 19-29, at all levels in various countries, through the use of online questionnaires and pre-synod meetings, young people shared their family situation, political realities and experiences of Church. Using online technology this allowed more than 200,000 youth to be heard. Much of the material in the working papers, is a result of this global participation.

Inherent in this type of attentive listening is the ability to listen in a new way. I experienced this spirit of openness to listening in a new way among most of the Cardinals and Bishops. They were trying to hear the realities of the youth and to understand them. Many were very good about taking time to enter into dialogue with the youth, encouraging them to share their ideas, and making the youth feel welcomed in the working groups. They even went on a pilgrimage together one day, walking 7 Kilometers!

The second seed of hope is the young people's authentic search or seeking for God. This search for God and for their place in our Church was repeated throughout the working papers, but more importantly I experienced it in the faces of the young people and in their sharing both in the Assembly and in the work groups. Many of our youth come from tragic social, political and family situations. They have lived through harsh experiences, and continue to desire to know what is God's will for them, what is the gospel path they are to follow for their future. They have deep faith and wish to use their energy, passion, creativity and diverse ideas to build our Church and to move it into the future. They are dedicated, resilient and hope-filled women and men. One of the most poignant moments was near the end of the Synod when the youth thanked Pope Francis and told him, we will be with you and our Church in the good times and in the bad times.

The third seed of hope is that the youth are waiting to hear our dreams. Pope Francis, reminded us of the words of the prophet Joel, that "we know that our young people will be capable of prophecy and vision to the extent that we, who are already adult or elderly, can dream and thus be infectious in sharing those dreams and hopes that we carry in our hearts" (cf. *Joel 2:28*.) This is a call to each of us to take the time to be with our younger members and to share the dreams and hopes we have in a way that is contagious and that creates space for them to develop their own dreams. If we do not share our dreams or have stopped dreaming, what can we expect from them?

Many of our congregations have ministries that involve youth. We are called to nurture the seeds of hope and the dreams within these young people. Do we need to develop new models of presence consistent with today?? Some of the dreams the youth shared are similar to ours. They, too, hope for a church that is all-inclusive, one that allows the gifts of women and men to be

incorporated at all levels including in decision-making. They want to help restore our planet. They ask that we listen and dialogue with them, trusting that they are not too young to be responsible or to be leaders within our ministries or within the Church. Young people are thirsting to deepen their faith, to know more, to try more within the Church. What do they expect from us...they ask for our respect, acceptance, transparency, authenticity, and some time spent with them.

Many of our congregations began with educating young children and we built schools and other institutions. We may no longer have these large institutions involving youth. Have we developed alternate ways to serve the youth or did we, in some sense, abandon them? Can we see new ways to be a presence to the young people who are searching for their place in the Church?

Sisters of all ages can be a listening presence to the young, to those who wish to share their journey, their dreams. Young people are looking for safe places where they can gather and be with other youth for conversation and company, to voice questions, even if we do not have the answers. Can we find an empty room or two in our convents for such gatherings? Our elder sisters are great listeners and often still carry many dreams. They can be a resource to the youth in a new way.

The fourth seed of hope, follows from our ability to engender dreams. It is the seeds nurtured in the Emmaus Story, offering a model for accompanying youth on their faith and vocational journey. As leaders we often speak of preserving memories, of recalling those moments when our own “hearts were burning”. These memories help all of us as leaders continue to walk our path of service.

Can we, like Jesus, walking on the road to Emmaus, meet not only our own members, but other young people on their road and ask them **“What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?”** Can we be fully present and tune into their conversation?

Our sisters engaged in youth ministry can use this same Emmaus model to help the youth nurture their abilities to dream, to plan, to discern and to move forward with God. Often we ask the sisters to do this important youth ministry after their full-time ministry is over each week. Is this fair to the sister and to the young people? As leaders it is important to let our sisters know we value their work with youth and that we are grateful for it.

The Youth at the Synod repeatedly expressed the need for spiritual accompaniment. A recommendation from the Synod is that more religious and lay people be trained as spiritual accompaniers. We have trained sisters and also, have training centers within some of our congregations. Will we consider offering accompaniment to more Youth and increase the number of lay persons in our spiritual direction courses?

All of us are invited to nurture the seeds of hope from the Youth Synod. One way to do this is by being the “dangerous memory” in each of our dioceses and parishes, in case some Bishops or Pastors do not choose to move forward the spirit and recommendations of the Synod. We may need to remind them.

In closing, I would like to share a 2 minute video, showing some of the life generated from the letter the Synod wrote to all Young People. Thank you.