

C-1 Courage in Facing Today's Challenges as Brothers of John of God

Introduction

You are now entering into the 4th Year since you concluded your 68th General Chapter, 2012, in Fatima, Portugal, under the theme “St John of God Family at the Service of Hospitality”. The homeland of your beloved Founder and the world’s great saint, the Chapter has launched you into a point of no-return. You surely continue to draw from the wellspring of that Graced Chapter! It would be good for us to do a quick recall...

2012 General Chapter presided over and prepared for by your former Prior General, Bro Donatus Forkan, reviewed the context of your Life and Mission, and together, as a Congregation made this Declaration:¹

“In the interest of the mission and the future of the Order, we need to maximize our strengths, pool our energy and expertise, while we still have the time to exercise some control over our destiny. Otherwise events will overtake us. Decisions about our life and ministry will be taken over by others who may not have an interest in the Church nor its mission of evangelization . We run the risk of becoming irrelevant or obsolete. It is not evangelical to say, ‘but we have always done it this way.’ We need to be creative and imaginative in how we want to be governed and the type of structure that will guarantee that the Charism of Hospitality as lived by St John of God and passed on to us, continues to be part of the Church’s healing ministry and an instrument of evangelization...” (Prior General 2012)

Realities today

Religious communities continue to decrease, while ages rise and mission needs increase. There is a perceived “Evangelical anemia, loss of fervor,”—all calling for deep prayer life and a move from the stability of BIG communities. Thus, there is a stronger call for everyone to be prophetic witnesses to personal holiness and to what is at the heart of the Gospel. What Pope Francis spoke to the Curia last Christmas 2014 applies to all of us. And we quote:

Pope Francis’ diseases of the Curia (from his Christmas 2014 message). But such diseases are also addressed to all of us. No individual and no structure is immune to these temptations:

- The disease of thinking we are “immortal,” immune or downright indispensable.
- The disease of excessive busy-ness, i.e., the “Martha complex.”
- The disease of mental and spiritual “petrification” found in those who have a heart of stone.
- The disease of excessive planning and functionalism.
- The disease of poor coordination, i.e., of losing a sense of communion and harmonious functioning.
- The disease of losing memory of our personal salvation history, i.e., “Spiritual Alzheimer’s.”
- The disease of rivalry and vainglory.
- The disease of living a double-life, i.e., “existential schizophrenia.”

¹ Dichiarazioni Capitolo 2012

The disease of gossiping, grumbling and back-biting.
The disease of idolizing superiors in the hope of gaining favor.
The disease of indifference to others.
The disease of lugubrious face.
The disease of hoarding.
The disease of closed circles, where belonging to a clique becomes more important than belonging to the Body of Christ.
The disease of worldly profit, i.e., turning service into an exercise of brute power.

In this context, it could not be business as usual. There has to be radical change! To live in modernity is to live in constant change, which cuts across boundaries. You had to pour “New wine in new wineskins!”

Your General Chapter continues:

A paradigm shift was the order of the day: from Monastery Hospital where Brothers were in control, doing fantastic and great service and sacrifice, something has to change. The phenomenal increase in number of poor and suffering led them to change radically. Life has changed; so did the system of delivering the health service. Hospital has become an industry, requiring new skills and management systems. There are now high tech facilities. There emerge new and tough questions: ***Could Brothers engage in such “business”? Was there a challenge to sell out? Hand over?***

Through all the challenges, questions and issues, and no matter what changes in lifestyle or structure, the Order of the Hospitaller will be on the side of the poor, be concerned with and involved in justice issues, social and community issues, protection of the environment, working with and advocating in behalf of the poor. This was an imperative that was non-negotiable!

John-of-God-Hospitality: new hospitality: not new: not limited to minister to the sick in the hospital but to address **human suffering in whatever form that it takes.** Radical difference from more than 400 years ago, but St John of God serving as inspiration, compass and guide, as Polar Star.

Radical change is called for! Unless there is a change in root and branch, in management structure, in mind set, attitude towards modernity and renewed passion for mission and for the work of St John of God, then the Order will cease in some countries in a short time.

From monastic structures to active apostolic religious in the midst of suffering humanity: move out from the walls of hospital monastery to market place of suffering. There was an imperative to tear down the convent walls and go “Borderless”—from hospitals to mobiles, expanding healing to preventive programs; nutrition, child-mother protection, etc, and looking at the world as a “field hospital” (as Pope Francis would challenge us today).

Restructuring of the Order: cutting off of some services; re-grouping; Good Shepherd; co-workers; re-claiming some hospitals; merging of some provinces and subsequent demise of others; (Japan joined Korea); PhI→? Inter-provincial formation; ? Form Public Juridic Person (PJP), St John of God Hospitaller Ministries. Co-worker as CEO for Hospitaller Ministries: giving lay person a major leadership role; twinning and sister services

Concretely, the changes done prior to the Chapter were confirmed and intensified: a re-reading of the Concept of Family of St. John of God and its Core Values: mutual trust, support, generosity, sincere respect, openness, unity in mission, hospitality. The General Statutes (2009) gave new impetus. Regional Conferences, as recent development, led to forging relationships/bonding and strengthened a sense of belonging to one FAMILY. Community and Communion assumed greater prominence. There was a stronger call for everyone to be prophetic witnesses to personal holiness and to what is at the heart of the Gospel. While new foundations were launched, as Millennial Foundation in China (2006), but soon after was considered a training Center of Excellence.

Major expansion of services, expressing Hospitality of St John of God....A School of Hospitality was first established in Granada, the cradle of the Congregation, aimed at a more solid formation of Co-Workers and Mission Partners. The co-workers were considered part of the extended Council; and it was the first time that co-workers attended the General Chapter.

What then is the role of the Brothers in this modernity? Simply and concretely, you were challenged to turn to the Gospel! To Jesus. To be witnesses of the Gospel of Joy!

Locus of Mission? Place of the Brothers in the Church: not at the center, but at the periphery; cutting edge! (What will the Brother do if he is not in charge?)

Type of Ministries: Not institutional!

Mandate for everyone: Personal witnessing. Go back to St John of God!

Type of Leadership: Transformational and Consultative.

New wine into new wineskin!

New evangelization! New Hospitality! You have Something Beautiful to share with the world today! Your General Chapter was a re-blossoming; just what the world needs! Re-claiming the Gift that your Consecrated Life and Mission is!

Reading through your Documents has personally inspired me. Praying to and through St. John of God, I felt, I could propose to you that we do our reflection these days within the Framework of your General Chapter: on the **Courage in Facing Challenges Today's Leadership as Brothers of John of God, Prophetic Stance in Identification and Formation of Leaders, Humility Sustaining and Nourishing for the Journey, and Relationships to Foster Regionally and Globally.**

Your coming together is an expression of your desire for relevance, for effectiveness, for growth, for better service in mission, for transformation. Although leadership has been important to humans since the dawn of civilization, specific patterns of leadership behavior vary over time and across cultures. Leadership has been found to be important to all societies (Bass, 1990). According to Paul, Costley, Howelly, and Dorfman (2002) the concepts of leadership, leader, and follower are represented in Egyptian hieroglyphics written 5,000 years ago. Between 400 and 300 BC the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle wrote about leadership and the requirements, characteristics, and education of leaders.

However, despite the fact that leadership has been a topic of interest to historians and philosophers since ancient times, it was only around the turn of the century that scientific studies began. Research, which they conducted over almost 20 years, suggested that leadership is not a position, but a collection of practices and behaviors. These practices serve as guidance for leaders to accomplish their achievements or “to get extraordinary things done” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 9). These practices seem to be essential components of the concept of transformational leadership.

“The way we look at things is the most powerful force in shaping our lives.”² Margaret Wheatley says, “We were once made to feel secure by things visible. By structures we could see. Now is the time to embrace the invisible.”

Learning, for them, is a lifelong behavior. In order to succeed, leaders must be prepared to make mistakes because every false step opens the door to a new opportunity. We, as leaders, are then called to COURAGE!

What Courage is not: Courage in leadership does not mean being the “tough boss” who is authoritarian or dictatorial. Courage is not the absence of fear. This struck me strongly recently when a Bishop shared about his life-threatening experiences in Southern Philippines. His stand for and with the poor, both Christians and those from other faiths, did not spare him the threats to his life and mission. Tearfully, he acknowledged his fear, but his guts and courage sustain him to be a prophet and shepherd in the midst of his flock!

What Courage is: It is a gift of the Spirit, as 2 Tim 1:6f. God gives the spirit of courage! Timothy, a man who was shy and felt inadequate, was gifted with courage for a mission, for God’s purpose! Courage, we could say, is doing what one is afraid to do. It is the capacity to resist fear, to master it. Thus, it is the quality of the heart or mind that gives one the ability to encounter danger and difficulty with firmness and resolve in spite of the presence of fear. “Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway, as someone says. (John Wayne, Source unknown)

Sources of courage: scriptures, SJGS

In John 16:33, we hear Jesus says: “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering; but have **courage**, I have overcome the world.”

Jesus gives us an example of courage. He also calls us to be encouragers! He calls his disciples to be courageous in the face of many pressures, afflictions, and challenges they would face as his disciples in a hostile world.

² John O’Donahue: Anam Cara

But as we go through the fire, God is not just watching. He sustains us and re-assures us of his own power and presence. He reproduces in us the same quality that sustained him through fire! Of course, this courage does not come through ease, but through pains and tears!

Courage in the Life of St. John of God (478 years after!)

His prayer, “Bring peace and calm, my soul!” must have included all his Brothers who came after him, 478 years after!

St John of God was never intimidated by anybody, when the needs of the poor were to be served. As written in the Hospitaller Newsletter: “St John of God had been a ‘man-about town’ in a very literal sense. He had gone out into the city or the surrounding countryside almost every day. He was in and out of the Archbishop’s Palace, the dwellings of the clergy, the palaces of the nobility and the homes of the wealthy and the poor; he visited inns and brothels, lawyers’ offices, merchants’ counting houses, shops, the market place, the prison and so on...”

In the same issue, it was written that on February 1550, last moments of St. John on earth. His words and gestures were a source of encouragement to this beloved poor, when Dona Ana Osorio of Los Pisas, offered him a room in her house so he could get the rest he needed: “My brothers and sisters, God knows that I want to die here amongst you. However, God is better served if I do His will and die out of your sight.”

John served the poor and sick for 15 years, but even at the face of death, his courage was beyond imagination!

What are the situations that call for COURAGE in the life of a Leader?

Allow me to draw from my own experiences in my 24-years of service in leadership. To put it simply, I would name them as: (1) the courage to clarify and give expression to the Vision of Mission in response to changing realities of our day (Purpose) (Persons); (2) the courage to engage membership to journey together towards agreed upon goals; (3) the courage to re-structure life and mission as called for by the agreed-upon goals (Processes). He does not do it alone. He needs the right persons to walk with him.

Vision of Mission (Purpose)

Provinces and Delegations usually re-align their local Vision to that of the Congregation after a General Chapter. It is not, however, a copy-and-paste thing. A provincial leader needs the multi-disciplinary tools of social sciences, among others, to do an analysis of the socio-economic cultural and spiritual realities of the people they serve in the light of their charism and congregational tradition. He needs to review what works well and what does not and what will help them to move together. *Who are we? What are we about? Why are we here?*

Membership (Persons)

What are the resources we have, human and material? How equipped are our membership to carry out our Mission? What skills do they need for our day and age? Who does what and how? The leader then needs a personal relationship with his members in order to know them more closely—their gifts, skills, interests, as well as inadequacies.

Some members would need more attention from the leader. Some need special care. Still others would need more professional help. The leader knows whom to walk closely with, or who just to tolerate and do some “damage control.” It takes courage to encourage members to grow...

Processes and Structures

What are the structures, policies, practices and processes that bring out the best in our mission, our members and congregation and the people we serve today? The leader tries to find and enhance God’s synergy in the midst of the community.³

**Congregational Coaching is finding God's synergy
in the midst of community.**

Congregational coaching as an incarnational approach of entering into and joining with the congregation to discover the guidance, collegiality, and encouragement of the Holy Spirit. This contrasts the classical idea of a consultant as the expert advisor or authority who tells and directs people what to do.

Congregational Coaching	Congregational Advising
Collegial	Hierarchical
Relational	Directional
Behind-the-scenes	Up-front focus of attention
Initiative is with congregation	Initiative is with the advisor
Hands-on helping process	Distant micro-managing
Discovers gifts	Critiques failures
Encourages	Directs
Synergetic	"Shifts the chairs"

³ Website on Congregational Coaching

Transformational

Transitional

Utilizes congregational leaders' innate gifts and resources

Dependent on gifts and resources of the advisor

Encourages mutual interdependence

Creates cycles of dependence and isolating independence

Generates hope

Generates need for supervision

How develop courage

Scripture focuses on going forward even when fearful, or when life seems impossible and the road impassable. It is related to giving encouragement to others.

To encourage means to give support in order “to inspire with hope, courage, or confidence. “Encourage” is found 23 times in the Bible, as “be courageous”, or “be strong and courageous” /”take courage.

Encouragement is finding or helping others to find the courage, by God’s grace and strength, to run the race He has laid out for us no matter how difficult or painful the course. Everyone can become discouraged to take on a responsibility or face a daunting task or trial. But we have a loving Lord who has given us all that it takes to carry out a mission.

We show encouragement not just through words or action, but also by silence and full presence.

Strength and courage come through resting in God’s promise. He’ll be with us! His grace is ever enough for us!

All of us are called to love courageously, to live courageously, to lead courageously, to follow courageously, and to serve courageously—as followers of Christ.

Without courage, we will fail to be loving, to sacrifice, to count the cost, to tackle the challenges or take on the responsibilities that God calls us to.

Some Qualities of a Courageous Leader

Dr. Eugene B. Habecker enumerates some⁴:

⁴ From Leading boldly in Chaotic Time

(1) A courageous leader understands the need to balance stewarding the mission with nurturing and caring for the people who help implement the mission. A Courageous leader keeps both ends in mind. Sometimes leaders hurt the mission by over-committing on the people side; some unnecessarily hurt people in the name of the mission and agenda on the other.

In these days of economic distress and financial shortfalls, the mantra sometimes heard is, "Don't waste a good crisis," and many organizations have not. Indeed, some have used the camouflage of "economic tough times" to cover up pre-existing mismanagement or poor policy implementation. That is not courageous leadership. A courageous leader chooses carefully, nurtures intentionally, and, when there is a collision between mission and people, works hard to preserve mission integrity while minimizing injury to people as much as possible. Make no mistake, a lost job hurts. Every leader knows the difficulty of trying to get right that balance, as well as the reality of sometimes getting it wrong.

(2) A courageous leader learns how to manage the gap between the strategic and the tactical, and pursues the mission with the past, the present, and the future in mind. A courageous leader is someone who understands that you just can't announce a vision and expect it to become reality. Rather, a courageous leader works hard to ensure that management disciplines are put in place to deliver and implement the vision. Without those disciplines, there will always be a gap between vision articulation and vision achievement. To achieve a great vision, outstanding implementation and execution disciplines must be embedded within the vision. Alternatively, part of getting this right requires leaders to move from primarily tactical issues to strategic issues. Because tactical issues are often the most pressing, they often get the most attention. Yet the decisions that ultimately lead to transformational organizational change, rather than only to mere incremental improvement, are those that require the thought that leads to informed strategic choices and action.

In the same way, organizations have to simultaneously understand and pursue their mission with the past, the present, and the future in mind. Institutions do their work in the present, informed by their past, and knowing all along that the majority of their beneficiaries are future stakeholders. Understanding these competing tensions, while knowing the need to get it right now, requires courageous leaders who think strategically without getting sidetracked by the tactical.

(3) A Courageous leader embraces the complexity of risk and understands the reality of failure in decision-making. Few organizations are blessed with revenue streams that keep on providing for ongoing needs, no matter what. As a result, new initiatives need to be regularly considered, and older or unproductive ones need to be ended or abandoned. Yet when it comes to program review, the reality is that organizations tend to add more than they subtract. Courageous leadership champions outside-the-box thinking and regularly pursues "blue ocean" alternatives, seeking the often hard-to-find opportunity and counterintuitive solution.

Think of the tough decisions your congregational leadership has made in adapting your charism and mission to the sings of the times: how you expanded your concept of FAMILY and expression of HOSPITALITY. You moved out of the hospital cloister to making the world as your “field hospital”, as Pope Francis exhorts all consecrated persons!

Your congregation had the option of selling or handing over your institutions. In some cases you did. But you look at the issue far beyond sustainability of institutions, to that of re-discovering your charism as St. John of God would have it 500 years after his time.

Not many leadership points are given to those who end up recommending closing programs or institutions. Yet risk is real, and the reality of failure is ever present in contemporary organizational life. Someone has noted that success has many parents, but failure is an orphan. Courageous leaders know and live those realities, yet lead through them, making the tough decision, albeit reluctantly, when necessary.

(4) Courageous leaders practice vulnerable trust. That is, they encourage those they lead to understand that silence on an emerging organizational problem is more harmful than is admitting failure, inadequacy, or incompetence. In an organization where admission of a problem or inadequacy or incompetence on the part of senior staff is not welcome, systemically damaging problems are hidden, or, if known, often ignored. These issues cause organizations to erode over time or to suddenly implode. We hear of meltdowns or breakdown in various sectors of the nation's economy. Either leaders hide the failures or put the blame on others.

Courageous leaders establish cultures where those who have a depth of understanding about organizational issues, both good and bad, are encouraged to talk candidly about those issues, without fear of retribution. As someone has written, "Few are the organizational misadventures that are not foreseen by somebody in the organization." Courageous leaders trust people enough as to encourage them to share openly and upwardly about discouraging internal issues or failed systems. In organizations where this kind of vulnerability is not encouraged, and when the issues or problems finally emerge, the harm may have already occurred, resulting in irreparable organizational harm. By building trusting relationships, courageous leaders encourage staff to practice this kind of vulnerable trust.

(5) A courageous leader, particularly in the difficult moments, works hard to "absorb the chaos, give back calm, and provide hope." By almost any standard, these are clearly chaotic times. In the midst of that chaos, people sometimes say the wrong things, sometimes pursue misguided agenda, and sometimes tend to be more brutal with people than with facts. These are times for courageous leaders to absorb that chaos, not by relying on their own strength, of course, but by relying on the strength and direction that comes from having learned the internal lesson, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Any Christ-follower who desires to walk in full obedience to what Christ calls us to be and do—to carry their cross—is called to live courageously.

Courageous leaders give back calm. They don't retaliate or escalate difficulty by making things worse. A harsh criticism ought not to yield a harsher response. And authentic emotion that demonstrates clear identification with the difficulty and the people dealing with it can help. Perhaps one meaning of the word *meek*—power under control—is what I have in mind. This leads to the leader needing to provide hope. Courageous leaders, pastors, and coaches do.

A courageous leader finds the hope, the strength, joy and courage in God. He is so anchored in God and His Word, that he relates deeply and intimately with Him. Thus, he could take risk, venture into the unknown, set new paths, face, admit, learn from failures and criticisms.

Conclusion

For you I pray that through the guidance of God's Spirit, you are able to recognize that (1) degree of difficulty is not the same as degree of impossibility, and (2) opportunity often resides where chaos and problems seek to be the sole tenants.

My prayer is that during these days of opportunity, yes opportunity, we will be empowered by the God "who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power ..."—to be courageous followers and leaders in our walk with God, in our relationships with our families, and in the places of organizational leadership where he has called us to serve

Reflection for Workshop

Your favourite Scripture verse that serves as source of courage and encouragement. Think of a time when you felt down and out. What has sustained you?

What are my "blind spots" that I need to outgrow?

Prayer for Hope (An Act of Confidence of God – St. Calude de la Colombiere, SJ)

My God, I am so convinced that You keep watch over those who hope in you,
And that you can want for nothing when we look for all from you,
That I am resolved in the future to live free from every care, and to turn all my anxieties over to you.

People may deprive me of my possessions and of honor; \sickness may strip me of strength and the means of serving you;

I may even lose your grace by sin;

But I shall never lose my hope.

I shall keep it until the last moment of my life;

And at that moment all the demons in hell shall strive to tear it from me in vain.

Others may look for happiness from their wealth or their talents,

Others may rest on the innocence of their life, or the severity of their penance,
Or that amount of their alms, or the fervor of their prayers.

You, O Lord, have singularly settled me in hope.
As for me, Lord, all my confidence is my confidence itself.
No one, no one has hoped in you Lord and has been confounded.

I am sure, therefore, that I shall be eternally happy, since I firmly hope to be, and because it is
from you, O God that I hope for it.

The saints that you have given to the world continue to multiply! We could mention a few: Beati: 2008:
Olallo Valdez; 2009: Eustachio Kugler. 2013: Bro Mauricio Iniguez and 23 companions. 1992, 71 brothers
from Spain and Cuba. Bro Fortunatus Thanhauser in India.