



31 October 2018

An Invitation to Generative Conversations

Dear Brothers

Greetings to you all from Rome, where we have been engaged in an extended period of reflection, discernment and dialogue on our Congregation and its place in our Church and world. Attentiveness to a contemplative attitude of silence and inner stillness has been at the heart of our time together. We are mindful of a long letter we wrote to you just over a year ago under the title of *Creating a Future Full of Hope*. Many Brothers expressed their appreciation, verbally or in writing, for our letter. As we have moved around the Congregation since then, we have been heartened by reports of how many of you have responded by engaging in community with the reflective questions our letter contained.

Following its meeting in June this year, the Congregation Leadership Group (CLG) sent this message to every Brother: *“Having discussed together in Rome during our annual Congregation Leadership Group gathering, we have taken the decision, for the sake of our Brotherhood, to discontinue repeating patterns of the past. Thus, we will not have the usual mode of Chapter preparation, so that a new kind of process can emerge – one that will enable us to enter into a reflective and generative dialogue amongst our Brothers.”*

It is the CLG’s belief that the flame of our brotherhood will be reignited only if we engage more with one another in intimate, honest conversations around questions and issues significant to our lives. From our experience, we believe that, as Brothers, we must make time and opportunity to sit down and talk with one another from the heart. If we are going to co-create a future, the CLG considers it is vital that we engage with one another in a process that is called “Generative Conversations.” The choice of a *Generative Conversations* approach was made at the CLG meeting when we saw anew that any sharing not from our hearts would not bring about the transformation we desire. We sense a strong call from the Spirit to speak deeply to each other in this period of our Congregation history.

Generative conversations are probably not as simple as they sound. We on the CLT have been working at them ourselves, and have found it helpful to have the assistance of a facilitator. That is something for your consideration. A valuable resource can be accessed on the following YouTube link, in which Matthieu Daum, our 2020 Congregation Chapter facilitator, helps us understand the importance of listening in Generative Conversations: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTMWbkymiS0>

In addition, you will receive from your local Leadership Team guidelines to assist in understanding and engaging in generative conversations with one another in community and in clusters, wherever practicable. This has already happened in some Provinces. This conversation could include the involvement of women and men who are associates and supporters of the Brothers in various parts of the Congregation.

Essential to the success of generative conversations is a readiness to speak the truth in love to one another, mindful that what we each see as truth might be different, based on our personality, perception and life experience. Similarly, it is important to create safe spaces, in which participants know that what they say will be listened to, respected and treated with confidentiality. The sharing of what is personal is often risky, because it exposes our vulnerabilities. It is likewise important to give full attention to each speaker in a group, mindful that feelings are often communicated with non-verbal gestures and reactions. These, too, need our attention and response.

From conversations with Brothers in recent years, we have heard expressed a desire for a more participative Congregation Chapter. One clear departure from past patterns will be that, from the beginning of February 2019, the CLT's Report to the Congregation (as required by Statute for a Congregation Chapter) will be distributed to every Brother in short sections, including suggested questions for reflection.

We anticipate that, from the ongoing generative conversations happening in every Province & Region, there will emerge issues and insights that will be of value to Brothers all around the Congregation. We, therefore, encourage you to follow the guidelines of your local Leadership Team in "harvesting" and sharing the fruits of your conversations for the benefit of the wider Congregation.

We recognise the differing needs, expectations, and hopes in different parts of the Congregation due to age, experience and a variety of other factors. We want to encourage the participation of all, irrespective of age and experience, so that we can harvest the rich treasures we have as Brothers.

Brothers, it is our hope that the process of generative conversations will engage us in co-creating our future.

In Brotherhood

The image shows five handwritten signatures in blue ink, arranged horizontally. From left to right, the signatures are: Hugh, Peter, Julian, John, and Richard. The handwriting is cursive and fluid.

Hugh, Peter, Julian, John and Richard