

Reflections on Hope-Esperanza Conference



Sister Rosalie Ruiz – I am so grateful to have participated in the conference, with its theme of “Risking Hope to Create Bridges into Our Future.” This “encounter” was a holy place of connection, of making worldwide friends, of sharing dreams of life as women religious. Our new friendships and our contemplative sharing and listening are important for building bridges into a future filled with blessings for everyone. This gathering helped me to have a wider understanding of being a leader today. I also discovered in this culture of encounter that when we are together, even the weak become strong. Sister Andrea Catubig – My conference experience filled my heart with open mindedness and perseverance towards empowerment of new leaders of this new era of God's vineyard.

Sister Elizabeth Ballero – The conference was about creating spaces of understanding where our differences are celebrated and differences of opinions are respected. It was about creating hopeful solutions for the future. We learned from each other and embraced collaboration to bring us closer to each other, to deepen our connections and enhance the importance of synodality. As religious leaders we are challenged day-by-day by our commitment to be authentic to our calling, to create the bridge of hope and love. The conference reminded us of the importance of having a voice, even though we may not know what we have to offer. We were encouraged to believe in our worthiness, that God created each of us to help heal our world.

Sister Kristine Marie Violango – This was my first time to join the conference face-to-face, and the experience was deeply enriching, with so much amazement and awe. It was encouraging to meet sisters from different places. I had unforgettable conversations with them. My sharing with sisters from different cohorts, congregations and cultures broadened my understanding and knowledge about religious life and my mission in the church. Risking hope in a place of the unknown is something that describes how fearless and brave we are called to be and deepens our trust in God's providence during our journey. These experiences were both challenging and enlightening and will enable me to be a bridge of hope for young sisters considering religious life.

Sister Derby Mercado – What impressed me about the conference was how it helped us to bring out the best in one another. It encouraged us to be curious and courageous. My experience of being a panelist boosted my confidence and allowed me to be vulnerable in a crowd. I didn't know at first if I could answer the questions that sisters at the gathering would ask me, but I did. This collaborative program taught me it is necessary to take risks for

a hopeful future. The conference taught us to allow our vulnerability to be known and to be humble enough to accept what needs to be formed within us to become a better leader and thus a better bridge to others.

I was especially touched by one of the young sharers, who said she has found a home in this hopeful gathering, as her congregation is nearing completion, and she is discerning how to live out her religious life. I was grateful that the conference emphasized the importance of sharing our resources and our time and embracing shared/collaborative leadership so that others may find a home in us. The need to create a “spirit of open space” that makes us more inclusive and welcoming to others also moved me greatly.

Sister Aura Matalines – The conference, with its theme of building bridges, was indeed a great gathering of sisters from all over the world. When I came to the meeting my heart was heavy and my shoulders were tired. But as I listened to the panelists, other participants and Sister Mary Ann Zollman, BVM, an older “wisdom figure,” who told us that her generation has had to learn that leadership is about vulnerability, I was relieved. I shared my own vulnerabilities with the group. I learned that while being vulnerable in front of others can feel risky, the gathering made me realize the value of being open. Facing our own vulnerability and that of others is both humbling and liberating; it is what leadership is all about.

I learned, too, that no matter how diverse we are as sisters in terms of nationality, personality and congregation, we have so much in common as women religious in terms of present-day challenges and opportunities. Most of our communities are growing in age and attracting fewer young sisters, and some are even near completion. But while vocation work is challenging, these realities inspire us as a younger generation in our communities. Those of us at the conference agreed there is so much that we can do within our communities and with each other. We can be bridges, creating new connections among us. “I am because you are,” an Ubuntu principle from Africa, became a favorite saying. It speaks of our responsibility and accountability to each other's growth and wellbeing.

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