

**Sister Mary Jo Tallman, CSJ**

Celebration of Hope  
St. Joseph's Provincial House  
Latham, New York  
May 7, 2009



I greet you with the words of St. Paul” “So may God, the source of all hope, fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that through the power of the Holy Spirit you may have hope in abundance.”

“Hope in abundance” Isn’t this our prayer and our challenge? In this time of change, in this atmosphere of economic stress, in the midst of mergers and closings, we are called to be people of hope.

While we acknowledge the difficulties and struggles of reconfiguration, while we make our way through this “in-between” time, we see glimmers of hope and statements about a new reality of Church.

From recent articles in “The Evangelist,” about the *Called To Be Church* process, we read: “Our Church will close in October, and we will merge with another parish. I am sure it will work out. Our pain and their adjustment are meeting in a spirit of good will and faith in God’s unfolding plans.”

And in another edition we read:

“... The consolidations will yield congregations that are larger and more vibrant. This process has forced me to see that there is a larger church out there, one FULL OF LIFE AND HOPE AND TOMORROWS.”

It is no coincidence that our Holy Father chose to write a recent encyclical on *Christian Hope*. Last year his visit to the U.S. was framed by the motto, “Christ our Hope,” and on the national scene, our president based his political platform on the very same optimism about change and reform.

The dictionary places HOPE in the realm of trust and confidence of fulfillment, “to entertain a wish for something with some expectation.”

I would say we have **great** expectations and rightly so. This is not our first attempt at pastoral planning, and it may not be our last. We’ve been here before, and we’ve learned from our past, and lessons from previous plans have helped shape the course of this time.

I was at a Deanery meeting recently, and we were already amending our plan. Life happens in the midst of the best of plans. I was reminded of a bit of wisdom my father used to offer me when he would help me with my math homework. He’d always say: “Do it in pencil first.” The ink isn’t even dry, and we amend our plans to meet the challenges of new events and changing needs.

Yes, it gets “messy,” and our efforts are laced with the human struggle of “letting go,” of compromise, of honest dialogue, but always with the goal of providing for the pastoral and spiritual needs of the People of God. This is an opportunity to shape our future, and we do so knowing that in the context of the Paschal Mystery we journey to new life. On the other side of our “Good Fridays,” we do have our “resurrections”

As Easter People we have set out to renew and enliven who we are before God and each other. We are being called to deepen our baptismal commitment; to live out the gospel message in ways that are meaningful and relevant.

Bill Bausch describes the People of God in this way: “We are a gathering of Christians. We support each other, and as a faith community, we become more than the sum total of our individual selves. You exhibit the gifts I don’t have, and I exhibit those you don’t have.”

You cry the tears I cannot cry, and I laugh the laughter you cannot laugh. You believe when I struggle with doubts; I believe when you struggle with doubts. Our individual pieces are partial.

Our faith, our HOPE, and our love are quite incomplete. But we belong to a vast community of time and space, and the mighty truth is this: Together we believe more than we believe alone. That is why, even with our doubts, we should stick with community.”

When all is said and done, these words describe the kind of Church, the kind of community, that will bring about the reign of God.

And isn’t this really our task – our task as people of hope, to bring about a community that is changing to meet the needs of our times.

And I conclude, with again, the words of St. Paul...”So may God, the source of all HOPE, fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

May you have HOPE in abundance.!