

## **HOSPITALITY IN A CHANGING WORLD: THE "VUCA" CONTEXT**

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, cmf  
Częstochowa, 15 October 2024

### **INTRODUCTION**

My dear brother capitulants of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God:

Please accept my cordial *greetings and my prayer* to Our Lady of Częstochowa (Poland) that she, the assistant of the Holy Spirit, may accompany you during these days.

*The location* of your Chapter is a symbol of fraternity, support and solidarity with the Polish Province, and in particular with the Drohobycz Community (in Ukraine), which is experiencing and suffering first-hand from the war; you have been deeply involved as Hospitallers in providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of the war.

Here you are with your co-workers - members of your charismatic family - to begin the *70th General Chapter*. You are 67 brothers who are part of your 70th General Chapter. You represent a multicultural Order today, spread throughout our planet. You are the living symbol and extension of a charism that has endured for 452 years.

The dream of Saint John of God - begun in such precariousness back in Granada - has surpassed all expectations. Today you have the desire to be "a John of God extended in history: always reaching new frontiers and responding to new challenges".

You form an authentic charismatic Synod precisely at this time when the second and final phase of the Ecclesial Synod on Synodality is being held in Rome.

You are here to evaluate the progress of your Order and charismatic family in recent years:

Here you are to celebrate the miracle of your magnificent survival as continuators of St John of God. And now you wonder what design of Order the Spirit is preparing and offering you for the years ahead.

May God the Father and Mary the Mother pour upon you the Spirit of truth and love!

I will divide my speech into four parts:

- I. United in Tradition and Open to Innovation
- II. The Chapter as an "event"
- III. Hospitality in a changing context: VUCA
- IV. Re-imagining hospitality: "the Spirit spreads out your tent".

## **I. UNITED IN TRADITION AND OPEN TO INNOVATION**

### **1. The grace of participating in the General Chapter**

Participating in a General Chapter is a real grace from God, it is a very special gift that we never deserve.

Your capitular task is both passive and active:

- *Passive*, because you will be open to the revelation of the Holy Spirit: He will be your Inspirer and Counsellor, as He was to your holy Founder. Do not let any evil spirit take possession of you and embitter you!
- *Active*, because - moved by the same Spirit of Jesus - you will work and shape a new dream of hospitality and offer your charismatic family an *updated version* of the charism and mission of hospitality, leading to "a new dawn" of the Order. Do not let yourselves be dominated by laziness, which does not consist in doing nothing, but in doing a lot so that nothing changes!

The Holy Spirit will pour out on your chapter community the charismatic intuitions of St John of God, retranslated in our time. Strip yourselves of pre-judgements, pre-conceived ideas. Marcel Proust was right when he wrote

*"The real voyage of discovery is not to seek new landscapes, but to have new eyes".*

## 2. A "parable" chapter on self-government

Your model of self-government is an example of power-sharing for our society. There is now among you - the capitulants - no individual all-determining guiding mind, no singular authority imposing its decisions. You act collegially. Let the charism guide everything from its mysterious logic.

In chapter time you will be a model of self-government in the Church, a model of synodality and round tables. You are not a pyramidal community. Or if you are, the pyramid is inverted, because you feel you are "the servants of the servants of God".

## II. THE CHAPTER AS AN "EVENT"

### 1. Charismatic sovereignty and the event

Your Chapter has been preceded by excellent preparation, as I have seen. Everything is well planned. But not everything is done: after the programming - a sign of responsibility - comes the "event".

Contemporary philosophers tell us that *the event* interrupts the continuity of being or the continuity of thought. The category of event helps us to think novelty, change and transformation in the increasingly complex and dynamic world:

- The event introduces novelty or difference and escapes simple and linear causality, as the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) said.
- The event is an unpredictable, incalculable occurrence that would not make sense in a framework of normality, as the philosopher Alain Badiou (1937-) says.<sup>1</sup>
- Slavoj Žižek characterises the "event" as a radical rupture, which interrupts the normal course of things and changes the coordinates of the field in which it occurs<sup>2</sup>. An authentic event can only be recognised retrospectively, as it alters our perception of the past. The event is linked to the possibility of social change.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey Through A Concept* (2014).

The current Synod and its possible consequences are a real "event" for the Church.

Your General Chapter can also be an "event" if you listen to the voice of the Spirit, the voices of humanity and of creation. You are ready to make your General Chapter a real "event". This is expressed in the theme you have chosen: "Hospitality in a changing world".

If the Chapter is attentive to this context, it is certain that this Chapter will be an "event" in the history of the Order. The Spirit of God the Father and of Jesus will grace you with a surprising novelty.

And to make it all work out that way, seek - wisely and generously - God's candidates to lead the Order into a new and surprising time!

## **2. The concentration of charismatic power**

You are aware that the charismatic power of the Order is concentrated in your General Chapter. You are like a magnetic field in which underlies the energy of the Gospel, the seduction of the Spirit, the charism of St. John of God.

Where there is so much concentrated power, something unforeseeable is bound to happen. You are now the supreme body of your Order. You form the charismatic collegium of St John of God in the 21st century. You are now entrusted with the governance of the Order. The Church has confidence in your decisions and will certainly approve and encourage them.

## **III. HOSPITALITY IN A CHANGING WORLD - VUCA - HOSPITALITY IN A VUCA-WORLD**

Hospitality is at the heart of your charism. Your hospitality has very definite charismatic traits, starting from the prophetic and disproportionate configuration that John of God gave it.

What has changed is the historical context. And your task as Capitulants is to reconfigure the charism in a new context which you have defined as "hospitality in a changing world". Let us meditate briefly on this motto and what it can suggest to us in this moment of humanity.

## 1. The "VUCA" context

Today this changing world is described by four initial letters that form the acronym VUCA:

- Volatility - rapid and often unpredictable changes,
- Uncertainty - difficulty in foreseeing future events and their impacts.
- Complexity - situations have multiple, interrelated factors
- and Ambiguity - lack of clarity in the interpretation of events.

And if this is our historical context - volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous - then your hospitality must operate in that context. Your hospitality will need new features:

- *agility and flexibility* to adapt to new situations requiring hospitality;
- *empathy* in times of uncertainty,
- innovation and new ideas in the face of new emergencies
- and resilience to recover quickly from adversity and maintain a high standard of hospitality in new and surprising situations.

If the VUCA world - volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous - affects companies, organisations and societies<sup>3</sup>, it also affects the Church and, within it, your Hospitaller Order. Prophecy in this context places you before a society in constant change, confronting you with uncertainty, with the unpredictable and surprising, with the ambiguous.

Philosophy and post-modern thought - for their part - tell us that we are no longer only in the world of "the complicated", but of "the complex"; not in the world of "certainties" but of "uncertainties"; not in the world of the "permanent", but of the "volatile and unstable". We find ourselves in a context that we must not ignore.

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jacobus (Kobus) Kok - Steven C. van den Heuvel, *Leading in a VUCA World: Integrating Leadership. Discernment and Spirituality*, Springer International Publishing, 2019; Harish K. Shivdasani, *Strategy: Viable Approaches for the VUCA World*, Pearson Edition, 2016; Jutta Heller, *Resilienz für die VUCA-Welt - Individuelle und organisationale Resilienz entwickeln*, Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden, 2019; Rob Elkington, Madeleine van der Steege, Judith Glick-Smith, Jennifer Moss Breen, (Eds.), *Visionary leadership in a turbulent world: thriving in the new context of Vuca VUCA*, Emerald Group Publishing, 2017; Rob Elkington, *Exceptional leadership by design: How design in great organisations produces great leadership*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018.

## 2. The "strategy" as a response

It is up to you, as capitulants of this time, to awaken in the Order a yearning for hospitality in this context defined as VUCA.

The most appropriate response to the VUCA context is not "programming" - to which we have become so accustomed. The answer in a context of uncertainties is "strategy".

*"Strategy in times of uncertainty is the ability to adapt quickly, remain resilient and collaborate effectively to navigate clear objectives in a changing environment".*

Whereas in the past, strategy was defined primarily in military terms, today, in a VUCA context, strategy *emphasises the importance of flexibility, learning capacity and creativity in the formulation and execution of projects in volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environments*. Today, strategy must define the new leadership and docility to the Spirit.

Your hospitality ministries today require "new prophetic strategies", i.e. a long-term plan of action to achieve certain objectives within the challenging and uncertain context. In times of profound change and uncertainty, "prophetic strategies" are needed.

You are not alone on this journey. The Holy Spirit is among you and He will lead you to the whole truth, to be "prophetic strategists of hospitality" and transform obstacles into opportunities.

Be in no doubt that this will be a prophetic time, a time of revelation through liturgy, communal and personal prayer, worship, interpretation of reality, conversations in the Spirit and unexpected inspirations.

## IV. RE-IMAGINING HOSPITALITY: THE SPIRIT SPREADS OUT YOUR TENT

### 1. Pilgrimage and hospitality

*Synodality and pilgrimage*, as a social and spiritual practice, makes you alert because those who are on a journey or pilgrimage or immigration need hospitality and inclusion. Pilgrims depend on the welcome and generosity of the communities they encounter on their way, which creates

opportunities for cultural exchange and social inclusion. In pilgrimage or immigration there is symbolic exchange.<sup>4</sup>

Hospitality in today's changing world seen through philosophical and theological lenses requires an expansive, ethical and adaptive approach. It challenges us to embody divine welcome, bridge human divides, resist exclusionary forces, balance technology with the human touch, practice environmental stewardship and create new spaces of belonging. This re-imagined hospitality has the potential to address some of the most pressing issues of our time, fostering connection and understanding in an increasingly complex global landscape.

By bringing together these diverse theoretical perspectives, "In Search of Hospitality" provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of hospitality in both social and commercial contexts.

## **2. Re-imagining hospitality: the Spirit extends our tent**

The idea of "Communities of Hospitality" has emerged as a radical and evangelical way of living this value. These communities should not only welcome the stranger, but also be spaces where cultural and social exchange is encouraged. In this context, it is vital to present hospitality to the new generations as a central element of your mission and way of life.

"*Communities of Hospitality*" that radically live the Gospel is the vision we must offer to new generations, remembering that our mission is to welcome the stranger and care for those in need.

We re-imagine hospitality in this time when we build communities of hospitality where all are welcome, where intercultural dialogue is encouraged and where each individual can experience divine love through the other; where the community can be transformed into *communities of refuge* for all those who seek welcome.

---

<sup>4</sup> Alison McIntosh, E. Moore Quinn, V. Keely, *Pilgrimage in Practice: Narration, Reclamation and Healing*, Cabi, 2018. Relationship between hospitality, territory, identity in cases of emigration and immigration. The book also explores how hospitality manifests itself through different eras and social structures; how hospitality practices have evolved; and what are the cross-cultural norms of hospitality. Or the impact of globalisation on concepts of hospitality.

Hospitality also leads us to constitute *sacred spaces*: spaces of inclusion that transcend traditional religious boundaries and reflect the spiritual essence of the act of welcoming.

The current environmental crisis asks us to re-imagine not only hospitality to each other and to others, but also *hospitality to our planet*. Today hospitality includes a commitment to care for the environment. The theology of creation proclaims that planet Earth is the home that God has given to all of us. We have an ethical duty to offer it to the next generations as a true home and not as a dunghill.

### 3. Introducing hospitality to a new generation

Today it is necessary to introduce hospitality to a new generation: For the early Christians, hospitality was a central element of the Gospel mission. This hospitality was not about entertaining neighbours, but about welcoming the stranger, especially those who could not return the favour. However, despite the urgent need, hospitality has fallen by the wayside. Christine Pohl's classic work, *Making Room*, first addressed this issue in 1999. And it remains just as relevant today, with the refugee crisis, the rise of homelessness and increasing loneliness and isolation.

The theology of hospitality needs to be presented to a new generation: combining biblical and historical research with experience in contemporary Christian communities.<sup>5</sup>

## CONCLUSION: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE FRAGMENT FOR THE WHOLE

The world needs more, many more brothers and sisters of St John of God. And it needs the charism of St. John of God lived by an ever more extensive and intense "Charismatic Family of St. John of God". New people and new places and spaces are waiting for you so that the charism can be planted there too.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Eerdmans, 2024; Joshua W. Jipp and Christine D. Pohl, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, Eerdmans, 2017; Yvonne Gentile - Debi Nixon, *The art of Hospitality. Revised edition*, Abingdon Press, 2024; Carolyn Lacey, *Extraordinary Hospitality (for Ordinary People): Seven Ways to Welcome Like Jesus*, The Good Book company, 2021.



You are the fragment of the Whole, which is the Order of the past, of the present and of the future. You form the symbolic number of 67 brothers. In you is present the whole Order from its origin until today, from heaven and earth and the Order of the new generations to come.

May God inspire, bless and grant you holy boldness in this noble and holy task!



## HOSPITALITY IN A CHANGING WORLD: THE "VUCA" CONTEXT 1

INTRODUCTION .....	1
I. UNITED IN TRADITION AND OPEN TO INNOVATION.....	2
1. The grace of participating in the General Chapter .....	2
2. A "parable" chapter on self-government .....	3
II. THE CHAPTER AS AN "EVENT" .....	3
1. Charismatic sovereignty and the event .....	3
2. The concentration of charismatic power .....	4
III. HOSPITALITY IN A CHANGING WORLD - VUCA - 4.....	4
1. The "VUCA" context .....	5
2. The "strategy" .....	6
IV. RE-IMAGINING HOSPITALITY: THE SPIRIT SPREADS OUT OUR TENT .....	6
Pilgrimage and hospitality .....	6
2. Re-imagining hospitality: the Spirit extends our tent .....	7
3. Introducing hospitality to a new generation .....	8
CONCLUSION: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE FRAGMENT FOR THE WHOLE.....	8
Index.....	<b>Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.</b>