Voices of Sisters
Spirituality





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Usually near the beginning of a new calendar year, I am used to hearing the theme of the year. Like some of the recent themes: the year for priests, the year of mercy,

the year of consecrated life, the year of the Eucharist and recently the year of the family. All these have helped us to focus on a given sign of the times and to work on it together, given that it was the church that gave us the theme in most instances.

While taking a theme proposed by someone else is good, I would like to do it differently this year. I identified a theme for myself for the new year. I thought that if I had a concrete goal that I can own and implement, I might take more responsibility. It would be interesting to see what each one of us would come up with if we did this! I chose to call 2023 "a year of collaboration" — are you wondering why?

I started thinking about this from Advent to Epiphany, when I was present to the events that took place before, during and after the birth of Christ as God's plan for our salvation. Reading the gospels, I realized that for Jesus to be born, raised and accomplish his mission, it took collaboration of men and women. This implies that women are as important as men in bringing forth God's plan for humanity. God has created us for a purpose and that cannot be achieved in isolation. God's saving mission continues and we need one another to make it a reality.

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When God needed a herald, he relied on Zechariah and Elizabeth and John was born to them in order to prepare God's people for the coming of the messiah. The salvific mission could never have begun without Mary and Joseph's cooperation. If Joseph had not cooperated, who could have protected the baby Jesus? For our salvation, many people joined hands to nurture Jesus until he became of age to fulfill his mission. All the encounters of Jesus' life reveal to me how collaboration is important if something great and lasting is to come about.

Today our world is faced with many challenges including poverty, drug trafficking, human trafficking, gender-based violence, post-COVID-19 pandemic effects, and unemployment. Addressing these issues cannot be a one-person show — one person can never solve the problems. It demands the power of many heads and hands. This entails bringing everyone on board and working together for the greater good.

Among all the challenges that have been experienced in the recent past, gender-based violence has been on the rise in our society. This results from power

inequality between males and females where one person feels superior to the other. In such a scenario, it becomes very hard to work together. During his launch of the synod on synodality, Pope Francis seemed to be inviting us to collaborate; he emphasized three aspects: communion, participation and mission.

For any progress to happen, everyone's talent and opinion counts. This requires people to value, appreciate and listen to each other. In this regard, Pope Francis points us to a key element in making our collaboration lasting and fruitful; he urges us to "look others in the eye and listen to what they have to say ... a call to become experts in the art of encounter."

This should begin long before we go out to the public, to churches and other forums that bring us together. For us religious spreading out into the wider society, it needs to start from our families and communities.



"Calling of the First Apostles" by Domenico Ghirlandaio (Wikimedia Commons/Cappella Sistina, Vatican)

The place of collaboration in the family is well demonstrated in the whole story of incarnation, and it took many other men and women to see Jesus grow in stature

and favor with God and his fellow human beings. Think of his neighborhood: Jesus encountered all kinds of people and through his communion with the father. It was by participating in life as it unfolded for him and his sense of mission that he was able to fulfill his father's will.

I observe that in our society, we are inclined to put divisions between men and women, boys and girls. We need to complement one another in order to bring to fruition what each of us can produce, while remaining the best version of ourselves.

What am I trying to say? Each one of us has a role to play in the world. Therefore, we need both men and women for God's dream for humanity to come true. Mothers are known to care and men are known to be providers. God's will prevails in the interchange of our gifts as we serve our brothers and sisters. Gifts will not mean much unless shared. To take good care of Jesus, Mary needed the security offered by Joseph while on the way to Egypt, during their stay and journey back to their native land. Likewise, for Joseph to fulfill his role as a father, he needed the homemaker that was Mary who created an environment that made their family take shape and stand out.

The whole concept of collaboration reminds me that each one needs to discover their call and do their part. Where this is lacking, a lot may go unaccomplished. Think of single parents — whether by choice, as a result of separation or death — the significance of the missing parent is usually felt and the gap it creates has lasting impacts on all in that situation.

The journey that started with annunciation and culminated with the paschal mystery could never have been possible without the collaboration with God, the father, and all those who played a role in it. After assuming his public ministry, Jesus appointed his 12 apostles (Mt 10:1-4) and later the 72 (Lk 10:1). This should inspire us to see how much we can do when we join hands and allow the best in each other to come out. This will in turn enable God's will to prevail.