



**BISDOM
ROTTERDAM**

To: Priests, deacons, pastoral workers in the parishes of the diocese

Subject: Listening Conversation about Hope in the Holy Year 2025

Rotterdam, February 14, 2025

In 2025, we as a Church will celebrate the Holy Year "Pilgrims of Hope." In our lives, we all need hope. Hope gives us strength in difficult times and encourages us to keep going. However, for Christians, hope is more than optimism or a vague trust that everything will be fine. Hope is a gift from God, rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ.

During a conversation with Father Richard Steenvoorde OP (Diocesan Student Parish St. Catherine of Alexandria), the idea arose to talk with young people about the theme of hope during the Holy Year. Such a conversation can be held in the form of a "listening conversation." This conversation method has already been used in the synodal process.

Enclosed, you will find the material developed for the student parish, where it will be used. However, these faith conversations are also very suitable for other parishes as communities of faith in the diocese. We hope you can also use the material in conversations you organise during the Holy Year to deepen faith, for example, during Lent.

The material was developed for young people but can be used by both young and old.

Best regards,

+ J. van den Hende
Bishop of Rotterdam

Attachments:

- Letter about hope
- Guide for a listening conversation about hope
- Ten example questions for a listening conversation about hope
- Bible verses

Letter about hope

Rotterdam, February 2025

Dear young people, students, and young professionals,

In 2025, the Church worldwide will celebrate a Holy Year with the theme 'Pilgrims of Hope'. In our lives, we all need hope. Hope gives us strength in difficult times and encourages us to keep going. For Christians, however, hope is more than optimism or a vague confidence that all will be well. Hope is a gift from God, rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ.

In the letters *Spe salvi* (2007) by Pope Benedict XVI and *Spes non confundit* (2024) by Pope Francis, we discover how hope can enrich and deepen our lives. Below, we briefly summarise the two letters. We invite you to discuss these themes in your own communities and circles of friends. You will find a discussion model and some sample questions attached to this letter for that purpose.

The essence of hope: God's promise and eternal life

Hope is not just a desire for happiness or success in the here and now. It is the deep certainty that our lives do not end with death, but that we are destined for an eternal life with God. This hope is built on the promise that we may eventually live in God's loving presence and that we look forward to a future beyond what we know now. This eternal perspective helps us see life in a new way. What we are experiencing now is not the end - there is a greater plan in which we are ultimately included in God's love. If you have questions about the meaning and direction in your life, this hope wants to be an anchor and give meaning.

Hope in action: social engagement and solidarity

At the same time, hope is not passive. It is a force that spurs us to action and invites us to engage for a better world. Hope inspires us to make our faith visible by engaging in justice, peace, and care for creation. It encourages us to look after those around us with love and commitment, especially those who are struggling. By drawing hope from our faith, we can work together to build a world where everyone has a place. Small acts of kindness, solidarity, and love can inspire others and turn our faith into concrete actions that help change the world.

Distinguishing hope

It is important that our hopes are real and deep and not based on false promises of success or fame. Hopes focused on material things, such as wealth or popularity, can often disappoint us because these goals are superficial and temporary. When we seek our happiness in possessions, status, or other superficial goals, we lose sight of the bigger goal. True hope helps us look for what makes us truly happy: love, friendship, and a life with God. It is not about what we have but about who we are and how we relate to others and to God.

Community as a source of hope

Hope is not something we have to carry alone. We find strength in community, where we can support and encourage each other, especially in difficult times. Together we are stronger, and in the church and in our circle of friends we find people who understand us and to whom we can turn. The church is a place of hope, where we support and inspire

each other. Together we can build the Body of Christ, in which we are united with each other. In this way, hope grows into something we experience and share together.

Hope as an active virtue

Hope is not a given - it is a virtue that we can practice and that grows through prayer, the Word of God, and the sacraments. By opening ourselves to God's Spirit, we are strengthened in our hope. This requires us to take time for silence and prayer, to open our hearts to God and allow our hope to be filled by him again and again. So, hope is not just a feeling but something we commit to, live and pass on to others. It is a verb: hope grows stronger when we encourage others and commit ourselves to something bigger than ourselves.

Hope that carries us

In this vision of hope, we discover a full, rich picture. Hope is rooted in the promise of God's eternal love and gives us inner strength. At the same time, hope is also an active force, motivating us to show our faith in the way we live and the choices we make. Thus, hope becomes something that can carry us through everything. It gives us an inner foundation and sets us in motion for the world.

Every believer faces the challenge of applying this hope in our own life, to look inward as well as outward. We may see our lives in the light of God's eternal love, and we may at the same time commit ourselves to our community and to all who need hope. In this way, we can grow as people of faith and be a source of hope for a world that sometimes needs it so much.

What does hope mean to you in your daily life? Think of a moment when someone ignited your hope. How can you pass this on? Discuss this with friends and discover together how small gestures can spread hope.

We hope you will have some inspiring conversations!

+ Johannes van den Hende
Bishop of Rotterdam

Fr. Richard Steenvoorde OP
Diocesan Student Parish
St. Catharine of Alexandria

Guide for a listening conversation about hope

A listening conversation is about really listening to each other. It is not a debate where you try to prove your point but a moment to discover together what hope means for each of us. It is important to hear and value what others share and experience.

Preparation

- **What do you need?** Make sure everyone has read the letter above and the questions before the conversation.
- **How many people?** If the group is larger than 10, divide it into smaller groups so everyone can participate.
- **What does the leader do?** The leader ensures there is time for everyone to speak, listen, and be silent. Invite everyone to share their thoughts, but do not force them. Ask someone to take brief notes of what is shared.

Structure of the Conversation

- **Sit in a circle:** Arrange the group so everyone can see each other, for example, by sitting in a circle.
- **Start with a candle:** Light a candle and read a short text about hope (such as a quote or a Bible verse). This helps create a calm and reflective atmosphere.

First Round: What Does Hope Mean to You?

1. **Silence:** Read the questions quietly and think about them. You may also pray if you wish (5 minutes).
2. **Sharing:** Take turns sharing what hope means to you in 2-3 minutes. The others listen without reacting.

Second Round: What Touched You in What You Heard?

1. **Silence:** Reflect on what touched you in the stories others shared. Write down what you found meaningful (5 minutes).
2. **Sharing:** Take turns sharing what touched you most in the stories of others (4 minutes per person).

Third Round: How Can We Spread Hope Together?

1. **Open conversation:** Discuss how you can make hope visible in your own lives and communities. Ensure everyone has the chance to speak.
2. **Closing:** End with a short prayer (in silence or aloud) and pray the Our Father or Hail Mary together.

Ten example questions for a listening conversation about hope

1. What does hope mean to you personally, and how does it differ from optimism or confidence?
2. Can you share with the group a moment in your life when hope made a difference? Who or what gave you strength then?
3. How do you see the role of faith in developing hope?
4. What does the idea of 'eternal hope' mean to you? Do you find it inspiring or also a difficult concept?
5. How would you like to turn hope into action in your life? What small steps could you take?
6. What examples of hopeful people or initiatives in the world inspire you? What can you learn from them?
7. How can a community, such as a circle of friends or church, be a source of hope? What could be improved?
8. How can you personally contribute to giving hope to others, including within this group?
9. What do you think are the biggest challenges for young people to keep hope in these times? How do you deal with these?
10. How can you distinguish between real hope and false promises, such as material success or status? How do you recognise the difference?

Bible verses

These Bible quotes are taken from the bull of Pope Francis for the Holy Year 'Spes non confundit' (hope does not disappoint) and taken from the New American Bible Revised Edition.

Psalm 103, 3-4.8.10-12

Who pardons you all your sins, and heals all your ills, Who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with mercy and compassion. Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. He has not dealt with us as our sins merit, nor requited us as our wrongs deserve. For as the heavens tower over the earth, so his mercy towers over those who fear him. As far as the East is from the West, so far has he removed our sins from us.

Romans 5, 5

And hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

1 Corinthians 15, 3-5

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.

Hebrews 6, 18-20

We, who have taken refuge, might be strongly encouraged to hold fast to the hope that lies before us. This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil, where Jesus has entered on our behalf as forerunner, becoming high priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.



In his message at the announcement of the Holy Year, Pope Francis reminds us that, as Christians, we must pass on the hope that lives in us through faith. That is why the Pope asks us to take action and promote hope in the lives of others through concrete acts of love: prisoners, the sick, young people, migrants, the elderly, and the poor ('Spes non confundit', nos. 10-15). In this way, we can concretely show and make others feel what the hope of Christ's love truly means in our lives as believers and how it makes a difference.

James 2, 14-18, 26

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but he does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or a sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and one of you says "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give him the necessities of the body, what good is it? Indeed someone may say, "You have faith, and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works. For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.