

# Choose Hope...

## Share Hope!



Christopher News Notes

*“I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”*

*—Jeremiah 29:11*

**H**OPE. That one small word can evoke so much emotion, so much power. Yet in our darkest moments it can feel so elusive. It's easy to feel hopeful when everything is going well and just as easy to feel hopeless when things take a turn for the worse. But saints, sages and people who have suffered terrible losses remind us that the key to lasting hope is learning to see the proverbial light at the end of even the longest, darkest tunnel.

Pope Francis has called hope a “miracle” and a “gift from the Holy Spirit,” a reminder that the kind of hope that can truly sustain us is rooted in faith; it’s not something we create on our own. It requires prayer, trust, and a sense of gratitude even amid life’s trials.

“Jesus, the hope, renews everything. So hope is a constant miracle...The miracle of making everything new: of what He does in my life, in your life, in our life. He builds and He rebuilds. And that is precisely the reason of our hope,” Pope Francis said in a 2013 homily.

Lisa Wheeler sees that kind of hope “when I look at my daughter who we received into our life through foster care adoption. It was one of the most difficult journeys of my life, but I committed myself to trust in the will of God and be faithful in prayer. She is a living reminder [of the line from Proverbs] that ‘hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.’ In fact, we gave her the middle name ‘Hope’ when we baptized her as that daily reminder that God fulfills His promises.”

Wheeler’s life in recent years has been one determined effort to remain hopeful after another—the decision to leave the security of her full-time job to start her own business, Carmel Communications; the illness and death of her mother, who was her best friend; the continuing struggles of her three foster children, whose future is uncertain because, after a year and a half in her care, they may go back to their birth mother.

“There are days when I am despondent, but I help myself by looking around at the promises that have been fulfilled. In my heart, I know that even if we lose these children to a broken system, God can heal our hearts and their mom from her struggles. He has shown me His faithfulness and so I believe,” she explains.

Wheeler has a special devotion to the Blessed Mother under the title “Our Lady, Undoer of Knots.” Although the devotion has surged in popularity thanks to Pope Francis, Wheeler says she discovered its power long ago.

## “Hope” by Maryknoll Father James Keller

- Hope looks for the good in people instead of harping on the worst.
- Hope opens doors where despair closes them.
- Hope draws its power from a deep trust in God and the basic goodness of human nature.
- Hope “lights a candle” instead of “cursing the darkness.”
- Hope regards problems, small or large, as opportunities.
- Hope pushes ahead when it would be easy to quit.
- Hope is a good loser because it has the divine assurance of final victory.

“When I find myself losing hope in anything I am doing or waiting on, I typically just say this mantra: ‘Mary, please untie the knots that are preventing XYZ from happening.’ I receive tremendous peace by just reciting that phrase over and over,” she explained.

## Acceptance Is Not Defeat

Talk to people who are hopeful even during dark times and you’ll find that they often focus on a particular quality that helps them see the glass as half-full. In a recent interview with *GQ* magazine, *Late Show* host Stephen Colbert, who often talks openly about his Catholic faith, said that he used to have a note near his computer that said: “Joy is the most infallible sign of the existence of God.”

On the surface that might seem like an obvious thing for a famous comedian to say, but once you dig below the surface and hear Colbert’s story, you recognize the power in his decision to choose joy and, through joy, hope.

Colbert, the youngest of 11 children, lost his father and two brothers in a plane crash when he was only 10 years old. Through his mother’s example and by reading for hours every day, he found a way to work through the trauma. However, it wasn’t until he got up on stage and started doing improvisational comedy that he started to come to a deeper understanding of his own ability to go after things he feared and accept life’s struggles.

One of his improv mentors taught him that he had

to learn to love not only the times he succeeded, but also the ones when he failed. To love the times of darkness as well as the periods of light. That’s a hard concept for most of us to accept, and yet it is the way of hope, learning to choose joy over bitterness, as Colbert’s mother taught him.

Here’s how Colbert puts it at the end of the *GQ* interview:

“It was a very healthy reciprocal acceptance of suffering. Which does not mean being defeated by suffering. Acceptance is not defeat. Acceptance is just awareness...Boy, did I have a [tragedy] when I was 10. And I learned to love it...That might be why you don’t see me as someone angry and working out my demons onstage. It’s that I love the thing that I most wish had not happened.”

What a complicated and compelling statement, to love something we most wish hadn’t happened: the death of a loved one, the loss of a job or home, the physical ailments that change our lives or make us dependent on others. And yet, so often, they do happen, and we are left to choose despair or hope, constant sadness or life-giving joy.

## Choosing to See the Blessings

When American-born nun Sister Annie Credidio moved to Ecuador in the 1980s to care for those suffering from Hansen’s Disease (also known as leprosy), she found patients who were neglected and suffering a great deal because of their ailments. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she recalled that despite all these trials, their faith in God remained deep and they remained people of hope. Sister Annie said, “Their spirituality shook me. I thought I knew what faith was about, but I found out that true faith is letting everything go and letting God take over.”

The patients’ hopes were rewarded because Sister Annie co-founded a program called Damien

House, which provides them with “medicine, the food that they need, and the dignity and the respect that every human being deserves.”

That dignity and respect can also be found at the International Academy of Hope (iHope), a school in New York City that welcomes children who have suffered traumatic brain injuries, many of whom struggle to even walk or talk. While that might sound depressing, the atmosphere at the facility lives up to its name. It’s hopeful, thanks to the teachers, therapists, and staff members whose enthusiasm and love for the children inspires their work.

Occupational therapist Laura Romanelli told The Christophers’ Tony Rossi, “The children make my day brighter. I get to improve their quality of life. It’s generally incremental. Maybe they can’t reach something or walk a step, and then, after a lot of therapy, they CAN do those things. It’s uplifting, and this job is a blessing.”

Speech therapist Zimmad Imam added, “If you give up on the kids, they can sense it. You have to come in here every day and be their hope.”

## Progress Always Fosters Hope

Stefanie and Manny Gutierrez had every reason to give in to despair after their daughter, Anna, died. Instead, they chose—and continue to choose—faithfulness and hopefulness, thereby serving as an inspiration to others.

Anna, who suffered from a rare neurological disorder

called Rett Syndrome, was ill from the time she was six months old until her death at age four. Even when their own hope was waning, however, Stefanie and Manny felt they had to be positive for Anna and their son, Gabe.

“We couldn’t look at the big picture of needless suffering or whether this was fair or not. We had to just focus on her care. One day at a time, if not one hour at a time. Breaking it into small pieces, you find yourself moving forward, if even just a little, but you are still progressing. And progress always fosters hope,” says Manny.

Hope has taken on a different character in the Gutierrez household in the three years since Anna’s death: “We still hold close the vision of a world without Rett Syndrome, but our hope is more rooted in seeing Anna again.”

Anna, who loved bright pink, continues to give Stefanie hope, usually when she most needs it. Regarding a recent family vacation, Stefanie recalled, “As we were walking around a town in another country, I was sharing with Manny how much I was missing Anna, in tears over how much I wanted her near. He said to me, ‘Let’s turn up this way, I think there’s a church a few blocks up.’ And as we are walking up the cobblestone streets, there is a Catholic church, Saint Anna’s. And what do you know but the church is pink. The entire church was pink! Those moments for me are undeniable [proof] that our family has a saint in heaven watching over us in a very special and real way.”

And those moments allow the Gutierrez family to not only **choose hope** but to **share hope**. In their uplifting Facebook posts and conversations, friends and strangers alike can see a deep and abiding faith that allows them to continue finding light where others might find only darkness.

That’s the kind of hope Pope Francis and the saints speak about. That’s the kind of hope that’s ours to choose.

  
“It’s better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness.”

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Editor-in-Chief: Tony Rossi

### The Christophers

5 Hanover Square, New York, NY 10004

212-759-4050 • 888-298-4050

mail@christophers.org • www.christophers.org

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*“We must accept finite disappointment, but never  
lose infinite hope.”* —Martin Luther King Jr.