Father Don Cozzens’ speech upon receiving the NFPC Touchstone Award (a priest whose leadership, words and deeds support the life and ministry of priests), presented at the 2017 National Convocation of Priests in Anaheim, CA.

It’s a real honor to receive this Touchstone Award from the National Federation of Priests’ Councils. I am honored because, as many of you know, I haven’t always been honored for my efforts on behalf of priests and our Church. So, my sincere thanks to you, Father Tony Cutcher, and the Board and the men and women staff of the NFPC. It’s humbling to be added to the impressive list of past recipients of this award.

Bishop Arturo Cepeda, Father Cutcher, brothers and sisters, I’ve been asked to say a few words as this year’s recipient. I’m happy to do so. I know there are a number of younger priests here at this meeting of the NFPC. But most of us are past our middle years—I sometimes think of us as the Medicare Corps. With this reality in mind, I’d like to mention two images of priesthood that might inspire us at this time in our history—the priest as elder and the priest as trail guide. Our secular culture, whether it knows it or not, is in need of the wisdom of elders and the direction of tested trail guides. God has created us for more than the two-dimensional lives most people in our cities seem to be living. We have been “programmed” for transcendence...for relationship with mystery, for living in holy communion. We seem to have lost our way.

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We presbyters, we elders, have something to say to our society. We elders are called to speak of the good news of God’s compassion and mercy...to be men of compassion and mercy living in the midst of God’s people. As elders, we’re meant to speak our truth without fear. Otherwise our caution chips away at our integrity.

Pope Francis speaks of priests as disciples on a journey. Trail guides, if you will. We walk with our sisters and brothers, we rest with them, we rub our tired feet with them, we eat and drink with them. “Sometimes we go quickly, sometimes our steps are uncertain. Sometimes we stop and we may also fall. But always keep on with the journey.” (Address to the Congregation for the Clergy, October 3, 2014)

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And to his elders and trail guides, Pope Francis says don’t be sad. (Chrism Mass, 2015) Perhaps there is nothing sadder than a sad priest. Francis is right, of course. People should see that we are fundamentally joyful disciples. But that isn’t easy. I’ve believed for some time now that we priests have been grieving...a low level grieving that we might not even be aware of. It’s helpful to acknowledge this grieving, to name it. And we shouldn’t be afraid to do so. Energy always follows an honest embracing of what is.

Some causes of our grieving:

There’s a clever, creative title of a book on our postmodern world that always makes me smile: Reality Isn’t What It Used to Be. (Walter Truett Anderson, 1990). For many of us, the priesthood isn’t what it used to be...for better or for worse. We appear to be unimportant to growing numbers of Catholics except for funerals, weddings, and baptisms. We’re marginal figures to be called upon occasionally.
Father Don Cozzens, Continued

Many of us are aging and tired. And we are told simply to recruit and pray for vocations.

We are divided into so-called Vatican II priests and John Paul II priests.

And we are still trying to cope with the nightmare of clergy abuse of children and teens. We don’t seem to know how to heal the deep wounds some priests have inflicted. I think our rectors should require their seminarians approaching ordination to take the physicians’ Hippocratic Oath to “Do no Harm”!

I believe we are grieving…but that’s no excuse for not being joyful. It’s been said “We are not grateful because we are happy, we are happy because we are grateful.” (David Steindl-Rast).

We men of Eucharist know something about gratitude. May we elders be “joyful grievers” and confident trail guides. After all, we don’t walk alone.

Finally, let me say that I think history will look kindly on us priests who keep slogging on in very difficult, very challenging times.

Thank you for honoring me with your Touchstone Award.

SAVE THE DATE!

2018 National Convocation of Priests

Open to all Catholic priests - see nfpc.org for more information

312-442-9700 nfpc@nfpc.org

Millennium Knickerbocker Hotel
Downtown Chicago, IL
April 23-26, 2018
Leslye Colvin is the communications coordinator for Gathering for Mission. She has a range of experience in promoting mission and expanding outreach in a variety of sectors including faith-based nonprofit and at the archdiocesan level. She earned a master’s degree in Communications from University of Massachusetts, Amherst and her undergraduate degree from Xavier University of Louisiana. A JustFaith graduate and former CCHD intern, she also holds a certificate in Catholic Social Teaching, and belongs to St. Columba Parish in Dothan, AL.

Gathering to Engage in Dialogue with the Voice and Vision of Pope Francis

A man humbly enters the global stage of a hungry world – an abundant world seemingly anesthetized to the reality of those on the margins. Like the one whom he follows did 2000 years ago, he seeks to encounter, to embrace, and to listen to those cast to the peripheries by systems of indifference – the ill, the imprisoned, the migrant, the poor, the refugee, the other. Summily, his faith and life lessons compel him towards inclusion as he affirms their dignity, their humanity. Before choosing his name, he is reminded to remember the poor, a prophetic act speaking to how he would move forward in this new mission.

“I was seated next to...Cardinal Claudio Hummes...And when the votes reached two thirds, there was the usual applause, because the Pope had been elected. And he gave me a hug and a kiss, and said: ‘Don’t forget the poor!’ And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were still being counted, till the end. Francis is also the man of peace. That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation; these days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, do we? He is the man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man...How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!”

Pope Francis is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation, the man who proclaims *The Joy of the Gospel*. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) embraced the Pontiff with its recent Convocation for Catholic Leaders in Orlando, FL. For four days in early July, 160 ordinaries gathered with 3000 other Catholic leaders, clergy and laity, to share with and listen to members of the Body of Christ. The unprecedented event was recognized by attendees as an opportunity to begin anew the exodus required for the authentic dialogue in dioceses, parishes, and communities that Pope Francis spoke of when in the United States.

The National Federation of Priests’ Councils (NFPC) similarly declared its intention to forge a future with Pope Francis in the theme of its 2017 convocation. The gathering in Anaheim, CA provided an opportunity for clergy brethren from across the United States to connect with one another as they renewed and rejuvenated themselves for the journey to the margins and the experience of encounter. Celebrating its golden anniversary in 2018, NFPC continues to journey with the Holy Father to the margins.

For those in USCCB and NFPC heeding Pope Francis’ call for a culture of inclusion, dialogue is the method he consistently advocates. Speaking to the bishops of the United States during his 2015 Apostolic Visit, he clearly stated: “Dialogue is our method...The path ahead, then, is dialogue among yourselves, dialogue in your presbyterates, dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society. I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly. The richer the heritage which you are called to share with parrhesia, the more eloquent should be the humility with which you should offer it. Do not be afraid to set out on that ‘exodus’ which is necessary for all authentic dialogue.”

Inspired by and in response to his advocacy, Gathering for Mission engages all levels of church leadership in dialogue with the voice and vision of Pope Francis as it makes available to ecclesial leaders and seminarians practical experience in the dialogic process. Like the time of the Second Vatican Council, the Church stands upon the precipice of a kairos moment through which clergy and laity can experience an ineffable transformation. Upon the invitation of the bishop, Gathering for Mission offers a day-long experience of the dialogic process including deep listening and open sharing for clergy of the diocese. Experience shows that participants are quick to recognize how their newly acquired skills can enhance and benefit their mission. Subsequent visits are scheduled for diocesan staff, and other leaders, according to the dynamics of the diocese and the bishop’s desire. Gathering for Mission offers seminaries two days in which seminarians, the future leadership of the church, additionally experience and reflect on mission activity.

The focal points for the gatherings are video triptychs from a new series commissioned for the project and produced by Maryknoll Media. Each includes a teaching of Christ Jesus, a related teaching of Pope Francis,
Leslye Colvin, Continued - 2

and a modern-day witness to the teaching.

The video themes are:
Called to Be Disciples
The Joy of the Gospel
A Humble, Pilgrim Church
A Church That Listens
The People of God
Nothing Is Impossible with God
Hearts of Mercy and Compassion
Building a Culture of Encounter
The Cry of the Poor
Caring for Our Common Home
All Are Welcome
Discerning New Voices and New Gifts

Gathering for Mission is a five-year project of Catholic Committee of the South (CCS) in partnership with Glenmary’s Commission on Peace, Justice and Care of Creation, and Maryknoll Media. CCS is a network of the church to address social justice issues that are often unable to be resolved on their own at the local level. The mission of CCS is to listen to the cry of struggling peoples, identify the injustice, bring the voice of the Gospel to the reflection, and encourage the faith community to take action. The theological foundation is the social justice teaching of the church and the gospel mandate to uphold the God-given human dignity of each and every person.

Founded in 1939 as a regional effort for bishops to address issues of land, labor, and race, CCS grew to become a network of bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, field workers, and grassroots organizers across the south committed to solidarity with those on the margins. While never ceasing to exist, CCS became dormant in the 1950s with the intensified struggle for civil rights and racial integration. Yet, there were always those who would “carry the banner” for CCS as issues of injustice became public.

In 1980, a group of Catholic priests, sisters and laity reinvigorated the network, organized annual Gatherings, and incorporated CCS as a 501(c)3 in the State of Mississippi. It is listed in the Catholic Directory in the Diocese of Jackson in the 2015 directory on page 600, column 2. Through the efforts of CCS, the 48 Southern bishops signed and promulgated a pastoral letter in 1999 entitled, “Voices and Choices: Justice in the Workplace.” The pastoral letter raised the problems encountered by those working in the poultry industry, from farmers to catchers to factory workers. In the early 2000s, CCS worked with the bishops to publish a series of eight statements on the criminal justice system. They include:
“Challenges for the Criminal Justice Process in the South”
“Wardens from Wall Street: Prison Privatization”
“Juvenile Justice in the South”
“Restorative Justice in the South”
“Prison Conditions”
“Post-Release from Prison”
“Women in Prison”
“Call for Action”

CCS has collaborated with other groups to support community efforts including the work of Building the World House, an effort to build bridges between African American and Latino groups; and “The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking Our Place in the Stories that Shape Us,” the People’s Pastoral of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia. The Gathering, CCS’ annual meeting, is hosted in various regions of the south much as it was in the network’s earliest days. It provides an opportunity for members to address the range of social justice issues on which they are working and receive recommendations for future action when a response is imperative. Since 2012, the testimony offered at each Gathering has been the basis of an annual field report which is sent to all bishops in the United States. CCS’ history reflects a fervent belief in the statement from the 1971 Synod of Bishops that “action on behalf of justice is a constitutive dimension of the gospel.” This continues to compel the network to go to the margins where it acquires the extensive experience in dialogue and encounter that are at the core of Gathering for Mission.

Let everyone be moved to look into the depths of his or her conscience and listen to that word which says: Leave behind the self-interest that hardens your heart, overcome the indifference that makes your heart insensitive towards others, conquer your deadly reasoning, and open yourself to dialogue and reconciliation.

Pope Francis
CCS’ Bishops Advisory Council, headed by Bishop Robert Guglielmone of Charleston, provides oversight of Gathering for Mission. It was upon Bishop Guglielmone’s invitation that the Gathering for Mission team attended the aforementioned Catholic Convocation of Leaders. Other council members are: Bishop Michael Duca of Shreveport, Bishop Joseph Kopacz of Jackson, Bishop John Noonan of Orlando, Bishop William Medley of Owensboro, and Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler. Gathering for Mission moves CCS beyond its region to serve dioceses and seminaries throughout the United States and Canada.

Through Gathering for Mission, participating dioceses and seminaries acquire the dialogic skills needed to forge a future with Pope Francis. Participants who are open to transformation thereby influence their environments and bring to fruition “a Church which is poor and for the poor.”

In honor of NFPC’s 50th anniversary, Gathering for Mission is pleased to provide a modified two and a half-hour dialogue practicum as part of the pre-convocation, Monday, April 23, 2018 from 12:30-3:00 pm (CT).

While Gathering for Mission will again be an exhibitor at the National Convocation of Priests, the practicum allows ecclesial leaders a unique opportunity to engage in the dialogic process at no cost. Letters from bishops who have experienced Gathering for Mission’s process are on our website: www.gatheringformission.org.

For more information on, or to invite Gathering for Mission to your diocese, contact the project coordinator, Sister Mary Priniski, OP, at 678.982.9441 or SisterMary@gatheringformission.org.
The National Diocesan Survey: Salary and Benefits for Priests and Lay Personnel – 2017 is now available through the NFPC Bookstore tab on the NFPC website. The Survey is being sold as PDF by the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators [NACPA]. An option is available to order a print copy.

The National Diocesan Survey encompasses three previous studies, the National Diocesan Salary Survey and the National Church Employee Benefits Survey by NACPA and The Laborer Is Worthy of His Hire by NFPC. The Survey was conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) during the winter of 2017.

One hundred seventy six dioceses and archdioceses in the United States were invited to participate in the gathering of information for the Survey. In the end, 80 usable responses resulted, a rate of 46 percent.

Both NACPA and NFPC are confident that the information in the Survey is key to helping diocesan leaders provide a more just and equitable work environment for both priest and lay personnel.

The data in this Survey is organized by region, size of Catholic population in the arch/diocese, staff size of the arch/diocese, and the estimated operating budget of central offices, excluding Catholic Charities.

To order, please visit: www.nfpc.org/bookstore