

**Age of Change
to a
Change of Age**

In the Heartland

**The New Moment
Convocation of Catholic Leaders Inspires
Des Moines Participants**

Seventeen representatives of the Diocese of Des Moines were fortunate to participate in the Convocation of Catholic Leaders in Orlando, Florida July 1-4. We were joined by some 3,500 other Catholics from throughout the country.

The theme was based on Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, The Joy of the Gospel. It was the stated expectation of the Holy Father that the message of this remarkable document be explored by national Catholic communities. The United States was the first to initiate the Pope's desire.

The convocation format was well developed with engaging liturgy and prayer, articulate and inspiring presentations, provocative panels, and informative breakout sessions. What emerged was a joint vision based on the acceptance of clear realities. The Gospel is God's pact with the human family. It assures universal love and redemption. It creates joy. The acceptance of faith, the penetrating commitment of our lives which it forges and the vision and mission it generates lead to the personal relationship with Jesus and the call to come together as his witnesses to be *missionary disciples*.

Speakers at the beginning and at the end of the convocation highlighted the reality that the Church and human history in our time represent not an age of change but a change of age. It is The New Moment, an entirely new experience, which calls for us to once again embrace the radical notion of what it means to be Christian and to engage in mission on the basis of intense, personal relationship with Jesus eventuating in our corporate identity as the Body of Christ.

The New Moment, which we are living in as Church, means working through the context of negative or problematic issues so that the Spirit might break out giving birth to that new age.

- Sexual abuse of minors by clergy. Certainly such behavior is deplorable. It has created enormous suffering for the victims and their families. The cover-up that resulted by Church leaders is again totally unacceptable. Repentant and humbled, the Catholic Church in the United States has entered upon a committed and effective path of reform through the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” and the “essential norms.”

What needs to be affirmed in its aftermath is that this unfortunate period does not define the Catholic Church in the United States. In concert with all of society, we need to confront directly and seek to uproot this evil wherever it exists.

- Exclusion and persecution of the refugee/immigrant. Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark has observed that, beginning with *Roe v. Wade* and the legalization of abortion and now in the mindset operative with refugees and immigrants, our society is tolerating brutalization of fellow humans on a broader scale. Where is the commitment to the life and dignity of every human person? In the end, as Pope Francis teaches daily, we are all one human family, brothers and sisters all.
- Denial of objective truth and rampant individualism. Today in so many quarters, there is no objective truth along with a very selfish individualism which perspective does not go beyond one’s local postal address. Fake news and fake truth emerge if the operative message is contrary to what one wants it to be. A society that is resistant to truthful objectivity will inevitably implode upon itself. Excessive self-referential independence is vacuous. Narcissus as he reached out to embrace his own image in the reflective pool, with which he was infatuated, splashed through water only to come up holding himself.

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The three foregoing issues are named so that we can continue to address them but at the same time move forward with the light and hope of the perennial message of Jesus.

The New Moment, representing the change of age as derived from the convocation, is not so much a program as it is a circular process calling for the religious person to constantly navigate around three key points.

- 1) Core to The New Moment is a movement from an encounter with the Lord Jesus to one of relationship. It is to strive to develop an interiorization of the gift of faith living by the reality that Jesus is the Son of God, he has the words of life. Especially critical is individual and communal prayer with focus on the Eucharist.
- 2) Particularly strategic in The New Moment is a pivot to young adults sometimes grouped together as the Millennials and often referred to as composing the largest proportion of The Nones, those who relate to no faith. In very significant numbers these have drifted from the community of faith. At the same time, more than any other generation they hold the key to the future. Their life search insists on authenticity, it gravitates to objective truth.

Whenever one group or generation is cited there rise protests in support of other categories: the elderly, the married, the single, the youth. In The New Moment all are encouraged to continue to reach out to those they best identify with. What is to be emphasized is communal attention to those most in need. Don't we care for the entirety of our bodies but focus on our hearts if we have recently experienced a heart attack?

- 3) The New Moment also calls for common action. Pope Francis has couched this with the category "Missionary Disciples." Christians inhabit the world of Jesus and imbibe his teaching. With the Apostle Paul, we strive to reach a state in which "it is not I who live but Christ who lives in me."

We go out, on mission, to uplift people, to remove their burdens and pain enabling them to open the door so they can experience the Joy of the Gospel.

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Publication deadlines force an issue. Under the constraint of an upcoming publication date of “The Catholic Mirror,” I took the first stab, or the beginning effort to try to spread the message of the Convocation of Catholic Leaders. Our attending group of 17 convocation participants will work hard to refine or expand its application in the Diocese of Des Moines. But we also want your reflections about The New Moment we are entering upon. Your written or email communications are most welcome!

Send your comments to bishop@dmdiocese.org or to Bishop Richard Pates at the Diocese of Des Moines, 601 Grand Ave., Des Moines, IA 50309.