

**Mass with FADICA  
Clearwater, Florida**

**Introduction**

I am very grateful to Alexia Kelley with the collaboration of Alicia Bondonella for the invitation to join you, my good friends, for this symposium of FADICA with the theme inspired by Pope Francis “Cultivating a Vibrant Church: Mission on the Margins.”

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Agatha. What we know of her is mostly legend. We do know that she died in Sicily during the Decian persecution (249-251). It is alleged that she was sent to a brothel to force her to give up her faith. When this failed, she was tortured and died in prison. Her intervention was credited with stilling the eruption of Mount Etna the year after her burial, and people began to ask her for protection against fire. May we pray with her, “You see my heart, you know my desires. Possess all that I am – you alone.”

What Agatha and her martyrdom call to mind is that the life of disciples of Jesus comes at a cost. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer the martyr at the hands of Nazi Germany, stated: “There is no such thing as cheap Grace.” The celebration of this Mass once again provides us disciples the opportunity to sacrifice all in union with Jesus to the Father.

**Homily**  
**FADICA Symposium**  
**Clearwater, Florida**  
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**Bishop Richard Pates**

Jesus introduced discipleship in his relationship with his apostles and disciples, his closest companions. Characteristic of those being sent was their total dependency on Jesus. They witnessed that all authority and power were derived from Christ. They carried nothing for the journey – no food, no sack, no money in their belts.

Their call was to repentance – to alter one’s life so that there was perceptible change – to leave behind that which divides and creating space for that which unites.

And the destination provides a sense of hope, with fulfillment – “the heavenly Jerusalem and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the first born enrolled in heaven, and God the judge all, and the spirits of the just made perfect.”

Pope Francis has revitalized the identity of discipleship for our times. We are called to be disciples fully imbibing the teachings of Jesus striving to make our lives interchangeable with the Gospel. With this identity we are sent to the margins, to the peripheries of the world to bring joy and meaning to those who are the throw-aways in our society, the contemporary Lazarus who is ignored by Dives, the wealthy one, who passes Lazarus as if he does not exist.

For the past three years, I have had the privilege to serve as Chair of the International Justice and Peace Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops which took me to 23 countries during that time: four times to Africa, three times to the Holy Land and Gaza, to Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Cuba and other destinations.

In these travels, I encountered inspiring disciples of Jesus. In the Ivory Coast it was the Director of the U.N. operation charged with establishing order, security and peace after a brutal civil war. He advocated for the dignity of every person, of justice and reconciliation as the path to follow, of addressing corruption and rampant violence. I commented to him how impressive his vision was. Originally from Benin in West Africa, he testified before a mixed group of 100 – “Well you know, Bishop, I am a Catholic and I believe the love of Jesus, fully expressed in his dying for us, is intended for every human and we must work tirelessly to make this love real especially among the poor.”

The second individual was a 35 year old energetic, gifted Franciscan priest from India who ministered to a refugee camp in Juba, South Sudan. There is probably no greater margin than being in a refugee camp. Those so sidelined have lost their material possessions, their dignity, their privacy and personal space. The Indian priest’s mission of compassion, of tenderness and deep care for these trapped people was evident to all. He was respected by the military personnel safeguarding the camp, loved by the people he served especially the young. The smell of the sheep was deeply ingrained into his person.

But the point might be raised, what does all of this have to do with me? So distant from these realities?

Pope Francis in his encouragement of us not only arouses our emotions and stimulates energy to serve the poor but also proposes great practicality. In his address to the participants in the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace on October 2, 2014 he stated: “In the Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, I wished to point out three fundamental instruments for the social inclusion of the most needy: education, access to health care and employment for all (cf N. 192)

For us practical Americans this simple delineation resonates strongly with our orientation. Accomplishing results and missionary discipleship coalesce.

In the poorer countries, the Church has been dedicated to building solid preschool, elementary and secondary schools for decades. Today in developing countries, even those ridden with conflict, the Church is embracing higher education.

In opening the doors to higher education the Catholic community is committed to developing indigenous leaders who, in turn, like the U.N. leader from Benin and the Franciscan priest from India will become missionary disciples.

The Church particularly gifts emerging cultures and societies which are handcuffed by corruption, the constant pursuit of oppressive power, and the divisive and sometimes cruel tribal loyalties. The gift is formation in Gospel values expressed in virtues – honesty, character, compassion, justice, kindness and a commitment to human solidarity and unity. “We belong to one human family, we are all sisters and brothers,” Pope Francis tirelessly proclaims.

Joined to the development of virtuous traits in higher education are strong academics, healthy pursuit of truth and rigorous educational standards oriented to producing servant leaders.

There are stunning examples of pioneers who have contributed significantly to higher Catholic education liberating students and cultures from a dark future to one that envisions the new Jerusalem.

In July 2013 and 2014 I made solidarity visits to Juba, South Sudan. The Church and people of that country are struggling to build a new state and nation after decades of civil war. The process of nation building is not going well. The President and former Vice President engaged in political disputes that evolved into military confrontation. This split the army and embroiled the nation into a deadly civil war that continues to this day.

Despite the political turmoil, the Church has forged ahead to build leadership for a new future through higher education. Even before independence in 2011, the Church of South Sudan recruited Father Michael Schultheis, SJ to open the Catholic University of Juba. In 2008, starting from a collection of run down family buildings, Father Schultheis recruited teachers,

developed curriculum and opened the doors of higher education to dozens of students who had never had such an opportunity. The university is growing in numbers of students (now 750) as well as in curriculum offerings. It graduated its first class in 2012. An annex to the university to teach agriculture and environmental studies is located in Wau. The university has formed a partnership with the University of Notre Dame to teach peacebuilding. It has now procured a plot of land on which to build a modern university campus. This is the fifth such university that Father Schultheis has opened in Africa from scratch. Ghana's Catholic University founded by Father has grown from a handful of students to a bustling campus of 8,000.

This past September, I led a Bishops' Prayer Pilgrimage for Peace to the Holy Land. 2014 was a particularly discouraging year for Israelis and Palestinians: the war between Hamas and Israel, the widespread destruction in Gaza, suicide attacks in Israel, the senseless murders of Israeli and Palestinian youth, and heightened tensions at the Holy Sites. Jerusalem, the City of Peace, lies in a Land that has known little peace.

But one bright spot is Bethlehem University. This Catholic co-educational institution in the Lasallian tradition is building bridges between Christians and Muslims as they study together to create the future of Palestine. Seventy percent of the students are Muslim and 30% Christian; 70% women and 30% men. The University is striving to build leadership for a future Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel. Christian Brothers are totally dedicated in the midst of constant challenge.

The curfews, travel restrictions, military checkpoint harassment, and the negative impact of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, are factors faced by the University's over 3,000 students, and its nearly 15,000 graduates. Most of these alumni are serving the Palestinian society in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza in various professions and leadership positions. The University's story is one of people committed to pursuing their higher education – perseverance and courage in the face of adversity and injustice – working together in hope to build a better future.

In the summer of 2014 I made a solidarity visit to El Salvador. I visited programs of Catholic Relief Services and Caritas that serve poor persons. I met with representatives of the Church and with members of civil society courageously engaged in improving the lives of their people. My visit to San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, was particularly compelling, as it recalled a previous visit to that city when I had the opportunity to meet faculty and students at the Universidad Centroamericana, known informally as the “UCA.”

Founded in 1965 and located in El Salvador, this well-known university is sponsored by the Society of Jesus. UCA’s motto: “Universidad para el Cambio Social,” or “University for Social Change,” provides an insight into its mission. The UCA is well known for its work in the fields of sociology, social anthropology, philosophy, social psychology and theology. It is known as a center where eminent scholars, including Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuria, Ignacio Martin-Baró and Segundo Montes, spoke and wrote eloquently on the abuses of the Salvadoran military and government in the 1970s and 1980s, and on the effects of war and poverty on the population of the country.

Fathers Ellacuria, Martin-Baró and Montes paid for their spiritual courage and intellectual integrity with their lives; they were killed on November 16, 1989, along with three other Jesuit professors, their housekeeper and her daughter. A moving exhibit of artifacts, including vestments, blood-stained clothing and bullet-ridden bibles, is located on the campus, right next to the Faculty of Theology. The setting testifies powerfully that the Word of God cannot be silenced: the prophetic work of these fine scholars continues in the classrooms and libraries built right next to where they were slain. UCA is a powerful example of Catholic Higher Education in service to human rights and the common good.

These three institutions in such different locations demonstrate the potential for human development and enable the poor to grow in self-sufficiency and contribute significantly to the resolution of human need. In my visits to different bishops and episcopal conferences I was introduced to the widespread efforts to establish Catholic universities in country after country.

The bishops and Catholic communities in Africa and Asia are stymied to obtain the necessary resources to launch and sustain schools. A few fortunate institutions are associated with resource-laden universities in the Western world. Most struggle, impatiently searching for assistance.

Pope Benedict in his encyclical “Deus Caritas Est” asserted that for charity to be effective it must be organized. With this in mind, a coalition is emerging consisting of USCCB leadership, Catholic Relief Services, ACCU, AJCU, and representatives from religious communities that would establish a clearing house designed to assist in developing higher education in poorer countries. Its purpose would be to collect information on all of the existing higher education institutions or those on the drawing boards in developing countries and match those with available resources in the United States and beyond. These resources might be institutional in character, might involve the recruitment of available personnel in a wide arena of specializations and, of course, be supported by philanthropists who invest in the operation. Together, the participants would constitute a band of disciples preaching and effecting the good news through education, uplifting the human spirit and contributing to God’s glory as Irenaeus observed by enabling men and women to become fully alive.

Similar clearing houses and networks might be established to support the other two basic components of need specified by Pope Francis; healthcare and economic systems that generate jobs so essential to sustain a dignified even prosperous way of life.

Jesus is sending us as disciples who are products of the American and Catholic experience. Through God’s providence, hard work and cooperation, America has built successful intertwining institutions – education, healthcare and economic platforms that produce a substantial quality of life and contribute to the common good.

As Catholics, we have an appreciation of the dignity and life of each individual person, of the universal character of God’s family, and are continually being immersed in the Gospel. This good news calls for friendship and peace, utilizing development strategies and resisting military options in best resolving conflict and achieving peace.

The Gospel and the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem deeply influence our response to undertake missionary discipleship and to reach out to the margins of society everywhere. “To those to whom much is given, much will be expected.”