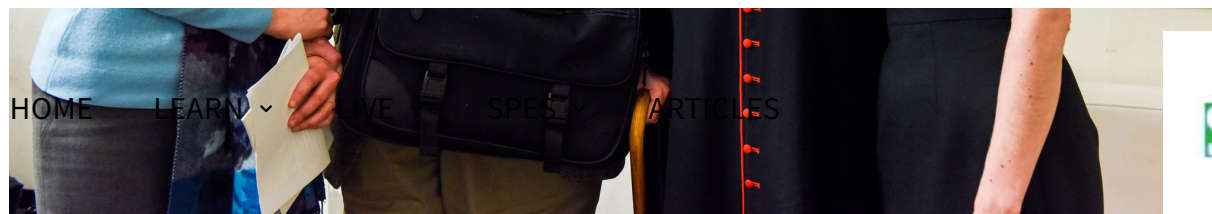




February 12, 2018

COMMUNION AND LIBERATION: NYC ENCOUNTERS FUEL BIG MESSAGE ON CAMPUS





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Speakers at the New York Encounter included Margaret Larcy, Deacon Tom Cornell, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, and Paige Sanchez.

When the international Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation recently convened the annual meeting called the New York Encounter, participants took that call for encounters both seriously and joyfully. The gathering, held Jan. 12-14 with estimated attendance topping 10,000 people, displayed zeal for an outreach that evangelizes in countless locations and contexts, poised for continuing growth.

Speakers and their sizable audience—from a panoply of backgrounds, spanning members of the Church hierarchy and artists in various genres, as well as men and women religious and educators, students and disciples in numerous initiatives around the country—assembled to reflect on antidotes for today's fragmented society.

The title for this tenth Manhattan-based Encounter, "An 'Impossible' Unity," emphasized the movement's conviction that a healing, hope-giving unity among persons is indeed the Church's promise through the permeating presence of Christ. That promise, press reports pointed out, underpinned Cardinal Sean O'Malley's homily to the group about Dorothy Day's power to bring diverse people together and Pope Francis's holistic call to respect human ecology alongside all of creation.

The proposal to experience Christ in our connections to daily living and to each other also resonated with participants from multiple

generations and component groups within Communion and Liberation

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One such participant was Sofia Carozza, a junior majoring in neuroscience and theology at the University of Notre Dame.

“We invite others to share our experience of ‘impossible unity’ so that they might recognize the answer to their own desires,” Carozza said of the CL community to which she belongs on Notre Dame’s campus. “The heart of every person is yearning for the same answer. Christ corresponds to the needs of all of us.”

She said her group, called Communion and Liberation University (CLU) like other CL communities on American campuses, invites all classmates to decide for themselves about its Christ-, Church- and charity-centered friendships. It now includes approximately 50 community members, including undergraduate and graduate students, as well as faculty and staff, as she wrote in a 2017 blog post for the Church Life Journal published by Notre Dame’s McGrath Institute for Church Life.

Many of the members traveled to last month’s New York Encounter, she told SPES in an email interview.

CL’s friends on campus now are discussing take-away points from the gathering as they share meals, times for fellowship and worship and weekly “School of Community” meetings, Carozza said. That weekly schooling, which conveys insights from both the movement’s current leader and its 1950s-era founder, is among the factors helping to make her more human, more herself and more Catholic, she added. The group’s mix of experiences constitutes an act of evangelization she sees spreading hope.



“When we, as members of CL, live reality intensely in all of its joys and sorrows as a gift from Christ, we show the world that there is an answer to human longing.” As Carozza put it, “What could be more evangelical?”

Another participant in the student community, Jessica Laenger, confirmed that the welcoming witness of classmates was crucial. Indeed, for her, the spirit of the Notre Dame group helped to validate an even earlier attraction to CL. Laenger said she had first encountered the movement while attending high school in Florida; she was drawn to CL’s mission of “verifying the presence of Christ in everyday reality.” The campus group’s ability to personify the fruits of that principle was a follow-up step of evangelization.

“I saw that these people were more happy, alive, human and authentic than anyone I had ever met before, and I wanted what they had,” Laenger said in an email interview with SPES.

Catholic media reports on the New York Encounter pointed out how CL had reached out to volunteers from all backgrounds in order to present talks on economics, politics, architecture, fatherhood, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the arts and more, along with performances and exhibits. The audience ranged from senior citizens to babies in strollers. All walks of life and fields of endeavor can be affirmed as important—and unified—through Christ’s presence in those realities, CL professes. The movement strives to encounter and love Christ there, as well as Christ in the Mass, the sacraments and the full life of the Church. With these focal points always heading its agenda, the movement stays free of formal membership requirements and obligatory contributions.

Mindful of the breadth of influences unifying the New York participants,



Cardinal O'Malley of the Archdiocese of Boston, celebrating the Mass from the Mass specifically recommended Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudati si'* as "an essential pastoral resource for combating fragmentation," according to the Crux news coverage. The Pope appreciates that everything is connected, and a consistent ethic stands up for life, from embryos to ecosystems, O'Malley said.

Other presenters from the Church hierarchy included Cardinal Timothy Dolan of the Archdiocese of New York and Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

Father Richard Veras, director of pastoral formation at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, NY, said he brought 45 diocesan seminarians with him, Crux reported. He hoped they would learn from the programming and experience their own encounters among the attendees and their broad discussions.

Sam Bellafore is one of the seminarians who joined the formation director at the event. He anticipates ordination to the diaconate this May. He also was a Notre Dame undergraduate, studying philosophy and vocal performance. While he first learned about CL thanks to the campus group, he did not become involved with the community then.

But the seminary's own weekly "School of Community" quickly became a source of encouragement and friendship for Bellafore.

"CL has reiterated that God calls us precisely through our human nature—our passions, weaknesses, joys and sorrows—to live out His love in the world," he told SPES.

Scheduled speakers representing academia at the New York Encounter included Steven Brown, vice provost and dean of graduate studies at



The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and Amitai Etzioni, the George Washington University sociologist who developed the philosophy of “communitarianism.” The event’s wide range of contributors further energized CL’s embrace of relationships wherever they occur—as in Rimini, Italy, where this movement hosts its biggest annual gathering for tens of thousands; or New York, where missionary disciples assemble and seminarians are likely to bring their experiences to future parish assignments; or on campuses like Notre Dame, where enthused students and educators do their part for the New Evangelization.

Students said their CLU’s focus on Jesus Christ, incarnate and eternal, helps them bring to their peers certain gifts craved by today’s young people (and people of all generations): a sense of solid reality that is worth clinging to; freedom to be truly oneself in the light of God’s presence; the joy of a loving community where no one feels alone; and a connectedness to everyday life that highlights relevance and responsibility.

Such gifts, it became clear, can be potent antidotes to society’s ills of distraction, indifference and supposedly “impossible” unity.

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