

A Reason to Hope – Introduction to the Summit on Mission and Evangelization
Kevin Foy

Greetings! My name is Kevin Foy, and as executive director of the United States Catholic Mission Association (USCMA), alongside our partners for this gathering, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith here in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and our special Vatican collaborator, the International Secretariat of the Pontifical Missionary Union, I would like to thank each of you for participating in “United in Faith, Sent in Hope: A Summit on Mission and Evangelization.” We look forward to traveling with you on this journey of faith and discernment.

When Pope Francis led us into the Jubilee Year, he did so with a clear understanding of the challenges faced by our world and Church today. In his words: “war,” “fears about the future,” “lack of job security, “[inadequate] social policies,” a socio-political “agenda...dictated by the quest for profit rather than concern for relationships,” and the many forgotten, abandoned, and maligned people at the peripheries of societal, political, and economic power: prisoners facing harsh detention and no prospect of “reintegration into the community,” the sick and those who care for them, young people anxious over an “uncertain and unpromising future,” migrants who find their “expectations...frustrated by prejudice and rejection,” the elderly “who frequently feel lonely and abandoned,” and, as always, “the billions of the poor,” those “who often lack the essentials of life” and “can easily grow...resigned” against “the constant tide of new forms of impoverishment...” (*Spes non confundit*)

Still, as Francis writes in his Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee Year, “We need to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence.” As globally minded, socially conscious Christians and coworkers in the Lord’s vineyard, we both take inspiration from and seek to embody those Gospel values which point towards the boundless love and compassion of Jesus Christ, the creative energy of God the Father, and the restless, relentless movement of the Holy Spirit:

- Our concern for and solidarity with those who are poor, struggling, or laboring, and with all those seen, by too many, as deserving of exclusion, scorn, and disregard;
- a commitment to global health, education, development, and disaster relief, reflecting the call to “go forth” to all the world, to “heal every illness and proclaim the Good News” of Christ’s love and presence;
- the embrace of migrants and refugees as new neighbors, the so-called “strangers” within whom we recognize the face of Christ;
- compassion towards the prisoner, seeking pathways to redemption and reconciliation, rather than rejection and retribution;
- the tireless work for peace and nonviolence, witnessing God’s dream that all the world might “put down our swords” and “beat our spears into pruning hooks”;
- attending to the earth and all the life which dwells within it, showing the care and concern due to God’s creation and our common home, and re-seeding hope for younger generations.

Pope Francis called us, during this Jubilee Year and beyond, to be “tangible signs of hope” for our world, reminding us that, “The death and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of our faith and the basis of our hope.” In case we didn’t get the message, the Spirit saw fit to use the occasion of Francis’ own death to inspire renewed hope within us. The global outpouring of concern for Pope Francis in

his final days and the overwhelming gratitude for his life and witness at the end of his earthly journey stand as testament to the power and relevance of evangelization in our hectic, divided, and broken world. Francis' joy, compassion, courage, humility, inclusiveness, and pure, inarguable love of Christ and God's people truly opened the door for the Holy Spirit to transform hearts, minds, practices, and ways of being, both within the walls of our Church and well beyond.

While we mourned and continue to mourn Francis' passing, the election of Pope Leo XIV reminded us that, in death, there is always the promise of new life. While much has been made of Leo's United States—and Chicago—origins, I, like many of you, take heart in other aspects of his background and sensibilities: his identity as missionary, immigrant, and global citizen; his membership in a religious congregation devoted to community and service; his dedication to Catholic Social Teaching and attentiveness to the challenges of contemporary social and economic life; his unwavering commitment to Christian nonviolence and an end to war; and his vow to continue to lead us, the Church, on the path of synodality.

It is fitting, then, in this time of transition and uncertainty, that we chose the 2025 Message for World Mission Day to guide us on this Summit journey. Penned by Pope Francis in the final months of his earthly life, Pope Leo has affirmed this brief but profound letter as the official papal message for the coming World Mission Sunday, which the Church will celebrate globally on October 19. It is a bridge, the "last missionary testament of Pope Francis," as our first featured speaker Fr. Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen, Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Union, recently pointed out. One which, as Francis himself stated, "reminds individual Christians and the entire Church, the community of the baptized, of our fundamental vocation to be, in the footsteps of Christ, messengers and builders of hope."

It is from this document, then, that we selected the themes for each of the sessions to follow:

- *Missionaries of Hope Among All Peoples*, presented by Father Anh Nhue, who graciously joins us from his home in Rome.
- *Bearer and Builders of Hope*, presented by Shannon Wimp Schmidt, my former colleague at the Archdiocese of Chicago and current content editor at TENx10, as well as author and podcast host.
- *In the Footsteps of Christ Our Hope*, presented by Dr. Tisha Rajendra, Associate Professor of Theology and Christian Ethics at Loyola University Chicago and author of *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration*.
- *And Renewing the Mission of Hope*, presented by Dr. Bill Gregory, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Clarke University and recent President of the American Society of Missiology.

Following each presentation, we will invite you into dialogue to discern and respond together to the movement of the Spirit within this space, moment, and people. Led by Drs. Anne Marie and John Hansen, lay Spiritans and seasoned educators and formators, who led us in our opening prayer, these conversations will be modeled on the Conversation in the Spirit process, which guided the Church throughout the Synod on Synodality. We invite you during these conversations to be open to the process and the movement of the Spirit within it, seeking to listen to God's voice through the words of your traveling companions, your own thoughts and reflections, and the sacred silence which works to bridge them.

We invite you, also, throughout this gathering, to seek out different tables and new conversation partners as each session and meal commences. We are here to learn not only from our distinguished presenters, but from one another, encountering diverse voices and perspectives to foster greater discernment and strengthen our mission community. Together, we will allow and invite new bonds of friendship, collaboration, and co-responsibility to form within this space.

With that, I welcome and thank you once again, and now introduce Father Anh Nhue, our featured guest and keynote speaker...

Fr. Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen is Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Union. The PMU is one of the four Pontifical Mission Societies, alongside the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Society of St. Peter the Apostle, and the Missionary Childhood Association. Unique among them, the PMU focuses on deepening missionary awareness and formation among clergy, religious, and pastoral leaders, inspiring a stronger commitment to the Church's global mission.

Fr. Anh Nhue is also a Conventual Franciscan Friar who belongs to the religious province of Warsaw (Poland). A priest of Vietnamese nationality, he holds a Doctorate in Biblical Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University. He is a professor of Exegesis and Biblical Theology at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of St Bonaventure and is an invited professor at the Pontifical Urbaniana University and the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Please join me in welcoming Fr. Anh Nhue, who will deliver our keynote address, *Missionaries of Hope Among All Peoples*.

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