

Catholic Volunteer Network

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Thank you Katie!

And thank you to your colleagues and members of the board for this gracious invitation to be with you.

Full disclosure: For as long as I have been aware, I have passionately loved the church and held its potential in the highest esteem. Its explicitly religious mission has formed the person I am today. That it is the largest humanitarian network in the world renders me forever committed to its health and vitality.

This is neither blind love nor infatuation, but love borne of time and gratitude and possibility. The more I am engaged in the life of the church, the more I become aware of its history, its mission, its ministries and its capacity. The church has ennobled me, and at times broken my heart.

Seventy-five years ago, our great grandparents, John and Helena Raskob, established a private family foundation with two intentions. They wanted all of the foundation's resources to be used exclusively to support the Catholic Church throughout the world and they wanted their children and descendants to be stewards of the foundation's resources. All participation is voluntary, non-remunerative and understood to be a serious commitment of time, focus and engagement in the life of the church.

As *teenagers* every member of the Raskob family is invited to serve as a volunteer to strengthen the Church through the instrument of the Raskob Foundation.

Today there are nearly 100 members, all descendants of John and Helena, actively engaged in the work of the Foundation. It has been an uncommon privilege to serve the church in this way, with the unanticipated, beneficial consequence of evangelization for our family.

Our faith lives are stronger because we have had the opportunity to meet, learn

from and support some of the most inspiring, generous, effective people the global church has to offer. We have seen the very best of the church through the lens of your ministries.

Parenthetically, as a child I was drawn to women and men like you - lay, religious and ordained - who had dedicated their lives to ministry and pastoral care and social justice and service. I observed that while these childhood heroines and heroes often bore witness to the worst of what humankind does to one another and to our planet, there was a palpable sense of joy about them. They knew who they were, and whose they were. Their lives were imbued with purpose and meaning. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to be like you.

The invitation to serve as a volunteer in the Raskob Foundation from the age of 14 to the present moment has shaped and influenced me so greatly. Thank you for offering opportunities to volunteer, to serve, to be ruined for life, to others. My whole life is a testament to how critically important and positively life changing service is.

At the Raskob Foundation we have also seen tremendous challenges facing the church and have been brought up to believe that we have an obligation to help solve those challenges, regardless of how difficult or seemingly insurmountable they may be.

The best advice I can offer in times of anguish when the institutional church fails to live up to its potential or manifests ignoble qualities – clericalism, fear, secrecy, prejudice, or mediocrity -- comes from my teacher and spiritual director, a beloved Sister of Mercy, Margaret Farley. She said, “Remember what it is you most love about the church and membership in it. Name what you love. Claim what you love. It will provide ballast to allow you to navigate with fidelity and focus when you are disappointed and discouraged.”

I have taken this advice to heart and highly recommend the discipline.

Have you thought about this? When people ask you why you are Catholic or why you stay? What do you tell them? What do you most value about our faith?

My list is long and wide. I love our church’s rich intellectual tradition, social justice teaching, sacramental life and imagination, mercy, the Eucharist, the primacy of conscience, prayer and transcendence, forgiveness, the preferential option for the poor and most vulnerable, the injunction to be Christ-like. I love that where there is human suffering, the church is at the vanguard of providing relief,

promoting justice and advocating for peace. I am daily grateful for Pope Francis. I love that he has given us *Laudato Si* and that it provides people of good will a seminal roadmap to care for our common home and one another. I love that our Church is wildly diverse and inspires people to serve others - especially those most in need -as a way to emulate Christ. And, with the heartbreaking loss one year ago of my closest friend, Fr Bob Beloin, I am grateful more than I can say for our church's articulation of the communion of saints, the conviction of eternal life, the fact that love doesn't end with death.

I submit that there are as many personally held and valued reasons why one loves the church as there are members of the church. Be clear, often, about what it is you most love and value, for that will sustain you in these times of challenge and difficulty.

My *best* answer, at its heart, is simple: I love the church, have dedicated my life vocationally to serving the church, and will never give up on the church because of one thing: You. Women and men, ordained, religious and lay, all over the world, like you in this room who have dedicated yourselves to Catholic social teaching in action, responding to the needs of a broken world as a lived and active expression of your faith. You are a reason for hope, my hope and the hope of all who know you. Never underestimate that.

Taking responsibility for the church, calling it to greater levels of holiness, accountability, transparency and trust is a responsibility of baptism. This understanding inspired Geoff Boisi to create Leadership Roundtable, a network of Catholic leaders whose sole mission is to help solve temporal challenges facing the church by harnessing intellectual, problem-solving capability, entrepreneurial acumen, contemporary best practices and a profound commitment to excellence and ethics.

Baptism is our gift. Exercising responsibility to ensure the church is welcoming, accountable, effective and the very best it can be is our right and our duty.

I have many examples of lay leaders who exercise their baptismal responsibility with breathtaking and compelling efficacy.

Our Church is so blessed and blessed in particular by laity.

They serve. They collaborate. They dream. And they evince joy.

Joy is a hallmark of the Christian life and faith.

How do we in our ministry and vocation cultivate joy?

We would do well to be aware. Pay attention. Be present. Remember that we cannot protect ourselves from sorrow without also protecting ourselves from joy. Cultivate a merciful heart. Encounter people who are different than you. Accompany people who are in far greater need than you. Let your heart break by this beautiful world and our common humanity. In vulnerability we find joy. This is what you offer your volunteers. A chance to encounter and accompany others, often very different than them.

People of faith, people of good will, are instructed to bear joy and to bear witness to joy even in the midst of oppression, suffering, poverty and broken-heartedness. This is not facile joy, but joy that comes from faith, faith in God and faith in something larger than oneself.

It is a spiritual discipline to cultivate. Faith that it is possible to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. Faith that it is possible to correct unjust structures. Faith that it is possible to eliminate extreme poverty and inequality. Faith that it is possible to ensure potable water and food for all people. Faith that we can protect and care for and be good stewards of our planet, our common home. Faith that peace can be achieved, that reconciliation can be effected, that forgiveness can be extended.

How in the midst of communal and personal suffering can one access joy, let alone radiate it? It seems incongruous, if not impossible.

Life does not have to be perfect for us to find reasons to be grateful. In the midst of tremendous human suffering there can be found compassion, mercy, altruism and love. Be aware of such grace and human kindness. It is everywhere, even and especially when there is concomitant human anguish and loss. Rejoice in this. Gratitude begets gratitude. Blessings multiply. And the fruit of the habit of gratitude is that soon one experiences blessing where before one experienced only lament.

When we bear witness to joy we offer hope to a broken world. And the world needs hope. This is what you – the members and constituents and beneficiaries and volunteers and former volunteers comprising CVN are about. This is what you

do every day in your ministry. And our Church and world are better for your witness and example.

And you don't need to be alone in this. This is one of the great insights the founders of CVN had in creating this network and supportive community 54 years ago.

Pope Francis made a surprise appearance by video at the TED talks two years ago in Vancouver. He said, “The future [has] a name, and its name is hope. A single individual is enough for hope to exist, and that individual can be you. And then there will be another ‘you,’ and another ‘you,’ and it turns into an ‘us.’”

We are a paschal people for whom suffering and death is never the end of the story. In our Catholic DNA, in our marrow, in our imagination is the conviction and experience that out of suffering and death can come new life.

Although my personal early formation was in the field of Catholic philanthropy- helping to give money away effectively and well- I have spent as much if not more time helping ministries – like yours- raise money.

What I have come to appreciate is that we are called to be generous and to serve as catalysts to inspire generosity in others. Generosity is humankind’s birthright. Everyone has something to contribute. Generosity is more than just financial. We can be generous in extending the benefit of the doubt, generous with our time. Especially in these polarized and divided times. We are called to share one Eucharistic table. We can even be generous with our very dispositions. You and your volunteers are examples of radical generosity.

On Generosity: Mother Teresa Story

We mistakenly assume philanthropy is the provenance of the very wealthy. This lets the rest of us off the hook. But a core tenant of faith is the call to live lives of authenticity, honesty, vulnerability, and generosity. Central to Christianity is the conviction that one finds life by giving it first away. Generosity, other-centeredness, mercy, compassion, relinquishment: these are constitutive qualities of being Christ-like. Everyone has something to give others. We do a profound disservice to most of the world and to ourselves when we relegate philanthropy and giving only to the domain of the very wealthy.

A favorite story attributed to Mother Teresa takes place at a food-dispensing center in the midst of great poverty and hunger. One member of every family in the impoverished village would line up with a single bucket patiently waiting their turn to have the religious sisters fill their bucket with dry grains of rice. A novice was shadowing Mother Teresa as she methodically greeted each person and filled each bucket. Before long an elderly woman reached the front of the line and to the novice's surprise, had in her possession two buckets. Mother Teresa greeted her by name and proceeded to fill one bucket. After thanking Mother Teresa, the woman turned to leave, stopping a short distance later to empty half of her full bucket into the second empty bucket. The novice, miserable to be witness to the extent of the pervasive hunger and inequity, turned to Mother Teresa and asked, "Why did we not fill up both buckets for that poor elderly woman?" Mother Teresa replied, "There is only enough rice for each family to receive one bucket each day. She has her neighbors' bucket and her own. Her neighbors are very ill and no one from the family could come to collect the rice. She is emptying half of her family's share into her neighbors' bucket to bring to them because she cannot carry more." Overwhelmed with sorrow, the novice demanded, "Surely we should fill both buckets and take the second bucket to the sick family for her." Mother Teresa stopped what she was doing and admonished the novice. "These are among the poorest and most destitute people you will ever meet. Never take away the right of another person to be generous."

SEX ABUSE

Seventeen years ago our Church was engulfed in the sexual abuse crisis. At the time I served as director of development for Yale University's Catholic Center. It was the most profound experience of lay – clergy collaboration that I have ever had. I worked in partnership for ten years with Fr. Bob Beloin, Catholic Chaplain at Yale and a priest from the Archdiocese of Hartford.

A major point of emphasis in our effort to raise money for Catholic campus ministry at Yale was the elevation of Catholic intellectual life on campus. Proudly we revealed to alumni and prospective donors that we were elevating and celebrating Catholic intellectual discourse, taking the topics of the day, illuminating them from the perspective of faith and inviting students into a dynamic discussion about the relevance and role of faith. Halfway through the Saint Thomas More at Yale capital campaign, quite dramatically and suddenly, and

most certainly devastatingly, the topic of the day was the Catholic church's sexual abuse crisis.

Nothing in our lifetime was more damaging, discrediting, heartbreaking or shocking about the church than these revelations.

It would have been tempting to admit our lack of culpability in the crisis and do nothing. Tempting, but not faithful. We knew that to do nothing is to be complicit. Instead we hosted a three-day conference entitled *Governance, Accountability and the Future of the Catholic Church* to examine the underlining conditions that may have contributed to the crisis with a view to making a meaningful and positive contribution to our church. We hosted 500 people over three days, featuring 30 nationally recognized speakers. The subject matter was wrenching and yet everyone left hopeful. We all belonged to the church. This was *our* church, understanding the problems at hand and placing victim-survivors at the center of our care was the first step, committing to being part of the solution was the second step, acting on that commitment was the third step. Participants left with the sense that it was possible, even if very difficult, to help call the church to greater levels of accountability and holiness. We could all play a role in making a positive contribution. And clearly the laity had much to offer, particularly in the areas of management of human and financial resources, contemporary best practices and solutions to complex temporal challenges facing church leaders.

Three months later, I met Geoff Boisi who delivered an impeccable keynote to a prominent group of Catholic leaders on the same theme, with remarkably consistent conclusions and with the same heartfelt motivation. Geoff wanted to help our church overcome what was properly understood as a managerial crisis. I was spell bound by his presentation, the content, the delivery and the respect he commanded by his presence, leadership and obvious dedication.

The best of Vatican II is personified in Geoff Boisi. He could have done anything with his time during this period of so much challenge for the church. An extraordinary leader and visionary, world renown for his financial and investment acumen, past chair of Boston College, member of the Papal Foundation, co-founder of Mentor, wonderful husband, father and grandfather, Geoff deserved some time off. But when his church was in crisis he did everything possible to

effect healing and reconciliation. Exercising baptismal responsibility—not only taking his faith to make the world better but taking his faith to make our church better, Geoff founded Leadership Roundtable.

It was a grand experiment that had never been tried anywhere in the world before this moment. And it is a comprehensive example of stewardship on the part of all of the baptized to care well for what has been entrusted to the church and to recognize the enormous potential before us.

Leadership Roundtable is an exceptional network of senior level leaders from all walks of life, all of whom are Catholic and committed to making a meaningful contribution to the church. It is comprised of ordained, religious and lay leaders from a diverse composite of sectors, industries, geographical regions and experiences.

These women and men bring with them decades of successful leadership, problem solving ability, managerial expertise, financial acumen, sophisticated command of technology, and capabilities in marketing and communications. They value the church and want it to be strengthened. They yearn to contribute to the restoration of trust that had been so painfully shattered by the sexual abuse crisis. They want to help usher in a new day of ethics, transparency, accountability, best practices and excellence. They highlight the particular skill and expertise lay people have at their disposal and the importance of recognizing and inviting such expertise to strengthen the church.

If there is any grace that came from the sexual abuse crisis in the U.S. it is that it roused laity out of our lethargy and enkindled a desire to act on our convictions that a better managed church, a more transparent church and more accountable church, a more just church, would be more effective at its mission, more faithful to its purpose.

We have particular charisms at Leadership Roundtable. We exclusively focus on the temporal affairs of the Church and do not wade into doctrinal matters. We are intentionally positive and laudatory. We emphasize our convening capability. We insist on candor and charity. We prize collaboration. We eschew competition. We imagine how much can be accomplished when no one cares who gets the credit.

We believe baptism confers rights and responsibilities. We think big and we never give up.

Thanks to Geoff and women and men like Geoff, today the Church in the U.S. has at its disposal a remarkable network of committed Catholic leaders from diverse sectors and industries where Catholic philanthropic capital and Catholic intellectual capital is brought together to address complex contemporary temporal challenges. Social entrepreneurial rigor is encouraged for high impact solutions. Practical, canonically compliant solutions are the result; evangelization of the participating leaders is a byproduct. All assets are utilized, not only financial. Imagination and intellect, expertise and perspective play dominant roles in deliberations. Problems are addressed. Solutions are proposed. Action is taken. Effect is measured. Everyone benefits.

Of course, we have much work still to attend to and one of our particular passions is equipping young adults for active leadership in the Church.

I want to share a story with you.

Sophie Story: Young adults Next generation:

In the context of confronting death especially that of my close friend, Fr Bob, and all that it means for the Christian believer, I recalled this story.

One evening, as relatives and friends gathered on our porch, the subject turned rather suddenly to the best way to die. The question was specific in its intensity. “How would you like to experience your own death?”

Over bottles of wine and candlelight we took turns articulating the pros and cons of the myriad ways any one of us might experience our own death. It was not entirely morbid. One friend was certain that dying in her sleep, peacefully, at the end of a long life would be the most desirable. Another suggested that she would like to die suddenly and quickly, without warning, ideally after a spectacularly joyful celebration with everyone she knew and loved. OK, that was me. But I hope it’s not tonight! Another suggested that he would prefer to have as much time as possible with the knowledge of a terminal illness in order to make amends, to thank his friends and family, and to be intentional about giving away everything he possessed. And so the conversation ensued until the oldest at the table, my father, turned to the youngest at the table, our thirteen-year-old daughter.

“Sophie, you have been very quiet and very attentive, but you have not yet volunteered an answer. Do you have an opinion on the way you would most like to

die?”

Everything became still and silent. I held my breath. Too late I wondered if she was too young for such deep, existential, distressing discourse. Perhaps she had never seriously considered the matter.

Now at the center of everyone’s attention, aware that a response was being asked of her, she replied very simply, “Yes. I hope I die saving someone else’s life.”

None of these answers were bad answers but only one was truly Christ-like. The child’s.

We cannot afford to lose this generation of Catholics. Not under any circumstances. We cannot allow the church’s prophetic role in the public square and across the globe to be eroded. Both are serious and urgent concerns.

In my estimation nothing is more effective at addressing this than what you all do: offering young adults meaningful experience to encounter, accompany and serve others.

Segue to esteem

From our perspective we have found that many young adult Catholics enjoy a positive experience of the church while they are in college, either because they attend a Catholic university or because they attend a secular university that has a vibrant Catholic campus ministry. Catholic students note the exceptional liturgies, relevant homilies, student participation, opportunities for service, and attention to helping them develop a mature adult faith that is both cognitive and affective. Why does the Church lose such active participants when they graduate?

The prognosis has always been the same. “College graduates drift away from the church for a period of time. They move to new cities, start new jobs, and encounter neighborhood parishes with very few single young adults. We know that the church risks losing them for a time, but they will come back when they get married, have a child or experience a personal crisis.”

I have heard this all of my life. But surely this is not a good strategic plan.

Leadership Roundtable in partnership with Saint Thomas More Catholic Chapel and Center at Yale created a curriculum and framework for preparing college students for meaningful leadership in the church immediately upon graduation. Leaders from across the country whose expertise was in young adult ministry, campus ministry, human resource development, leadership development, theology, canon law, ecclesiology and sociology were convened. A young adult leadership formation program was created called ESTEEM, Engaging Students to Enliven the Ecclesial Mission. Piloted on twelve campuses from Stanford to Yale and now in its ninth year, campus ministers invite “the best and brightest” young adult Catholics to participate in the yearlong program. Through retreats, seminars and guest lectures, students are immersed in ecclesiology, canon law, Catholic social teaching, intellectual, sacramental and liturgical life and leadership formation. They are exposed to the myriad opportunities for service upon graduation, are introduced to your programs. Each student is paired with a mentor, a local leader whose field of expertise most closely aligns with the professional aspirations of the student. Mentors are on hand throughout the year for informal discussion on the role of faith in professional life, in vocational discernment, and in leadership. The most significant aim of ESTEEM, however, is to equip the student participants for meaningful leadership after graduation: by being appointed to a parish pastoral council, a diocesan finance council or the board of trustees of a Catholic nonprofit. ESTEEM’s vision is two young adults in leadership in every parish, diocesan office, and Catholic charity. If young adults see other young adults in meaningful positions of leadership they know that their voice and perspective matter. Young adults serving on boards will learn from older more experienced trustees, offer their own perspective on ways to strengthen mission and attract a new generation.

We are also passionate about elevating and celebrating the role of women in the Church.

When our son and daughter were little my husband and I told them that if we ever got separated – in a park, at a museum, in any public space – they should look for a mother with young children and go to her because she would keep them safe and know how to reunite us as quickly as possible. I didn't tell them to look for a cop or look for a priest. I am haunted by the question, where were the women at the tables of decision making when the crisis broke- in 1995 or 2002 or 2018? And how

different would things have looked if mothers – parents – had been included in leadership and decision-making?

I want to be very clear: It's not that women are better than men, or that parents are more judicious than those without children. Or that laity are more capable than priests. It's that diversity matters. Who is at the tables of decision-making matters. We all need to solve for myopia. We all are myopic on our own, or within our own narrowly defined groups. We only know what we know. We *need* the diversity of perspectives and experiences to be healthy and whole and wiser and more prudent. We need diversity to be good stewards.

Which is why women's leadership, together with men, matters, and no solution moving forward will be complete without the presence and authority of women.

Let me begin to end with a heart full of gratitude for you present today, for members of CVN unable to be here, for lay pastoral ministers and for religious and ordained leaders who value, support, help form and encourage the vital role of volunteers in our Church. Thank you for who you are and for all that you do. Thank you for calling us to be more loving, merciful, faith-filled people. Here is a quick checklist of useful maxims that contribute to a life of meaning, purpose and joy. I have learned these from the way many of you model them in your leadership and ministry:

- Be grateful.
- Serve others by being a beneficial presence in their lives.
- Never add to another's burden or take away their joy.
- Notice and acknowledge even small details that brings you joy.
- Think big.
- Be generous.
- Extend the benefit of the doubt to others.
- Surround yourself with people who ennoble your spirit.
- Mentor and encourage young adults and provide leadership opportunities for them.
- Make sure the Church avails itself of the considerable talents of women, in leadership, in decision-making.
- Celebrate collaboration and diversity everywhere, all the time. Seek it out with intention.
- Know your priorities.
- Remember that people of faith are confident in the future.
- Begin each day with a little awe and enthusiasm.
- Resist cynicism.... After all a cynic is one who has given up but not yet shut up.

- Celebrate what is right in order to find the energy to fix what is wrong.
- Be the reason for someone's hope each day.
- Imagine abundance.
- And every day, every single day, choose joy.

In closing, the church is the instrument through which the Catholic faith is transmitted to nearly 1.3 billion people. The church is also the largest global humanitarian network in the world with enormous potential, and therefore responsibility, to address human suffering and complex global challenges. You, those present here today play a crucial role in achieving this and in passing on the faith born of meaningful experience to the next generation.

Let's be the church we yearn to see. A more relevant church to young adults, a more joyful church, a church of integrity, ethics, trust, justice and openness. A safe environment for the most vulnerable. A church worthy of profound generosity. A church at the forefront of justice, peace and charity. A church that avails itself of the talents of all of its members, acknowledges the gifts and competencies of women and utilizes those talents in meaningful leadership. A church that properly cares for all that has been entrusted to it, and responds courageously and confidently to the potential at hand. A church the world needs because the world needs solace, healing, peace, hope, mercy, generosity, and the light and love of Christ.

Thank you.