

## **Welcome**

When we started on this journey three years ago, we had no idea where the Holy Spirit would lead us.

What a perilous and exciting journey it has been!

But, we are overjoyed at the response.

Thank you for coming and for caring so much about the future of our Church.

Our dream of a big tent dialogue was not fulfilled—but our conviction that our church can change and incorporate a wide range of ideas, structures and beliefs is proven by your presence here.

### **Many ask: what can we possibly expect to accomplish at ACC?**

My humble answer is that we have already accomplished much:

We have given wide dissemination to the motifs of the Holy Spirit which were so much in evidence at the Second Vatican Council—baptism, participation, humility, ecumenism, conscience, and a commitment to help to cure the injustices of our world.

Thousands have attended assemblies at which we have expressed our joys at being Catholic, our hopes for the future, our fears for the faith lives of our children, and our convictions about what our Church must do to reclaim our hearts.

And, over the next two days, we will learn more, offer up our suggestions and ideas, network—

and set the stage for a real Vatican Spring—or summer

with the declaration of a statement of our Rights and Responsibilities as Catholics which will be a foundation for the work ahead.

Already we have received testimonials from around the world on the drafts of this document which have circulated.

### **But, our actions over the last 3 years have been set against a continuing horrific background of how our Church**

Has abused our children and destroyed their lives

Stolen and misused our treasure

And generally abused power by crushing dissent, ignoring *sensus fidelium*, disciplining theologians, giving up ecumenical opportunities in a grand show of arrogance that would make Jesus weep.

in the mistaken idea that the Incarnation was irrelevant to the institutional Church.

What a misguided notion it was and is—that our Church cannot sin!

All institutions are flawed—and any attempt to cover up those flaws will lead to tragedy.

**And it did—against hundreds, perhaps thousands whose lives have been destroyed by their Church.**

Every time we excuse these sins and cover-ups or ignore them or fail to remove the perpetrators and their enablers from our midst—we are equally guilty.

We owe profound gratitude to the survivor community for standing up and giving voice to these terrible crimes—which in a real sense gives birth to this movement.

We must say: **NEVER AGAIN**. And we must all ask for forgiveness.

So many have been hurt—theologians silenced, bishops removed, priests given up their vocations, reformers fired or excommunicated—**but none of this equals the pain and torment of those who have lost their lives to the sins of our Church.**

*Holy God, forgive me, forgive us, for permitting this to happen. And let your grace fall upon those among us who continue to hear your call, to minister to us, to work for justice, to try to heal our wounds and sins, to show us a spirituality that brings us closer to you O God.*

We will be presenting back to you over the next two days a simple statement of what we believe it means to be a Catholic in the United States after Vatican II. This is what you have been telling us. And we hope that as this weekend progresses, we will find it possible to proclaim this—as a re-starting point in the history of US Catholicism.

We have wonderful speakers, great opportunities for learning and contributing, places to meet those who have been involved in the movement to bring Catholicism closer to the Gospel, and spaces to network with others who are committed to the proposition that **Vatican II Catholicism in the US is not dead.**

*Welcome and Opening Comments at the ACC on Friday Evening by JOHN HUSHON*

We faithful Catholics want to reclaim our Church—and we will do it by demonstrating how much we really care.

We will give our baptized friends the liberty to be temporarily “Catholics in Diaspora”—worshipping as they can, cherishing sacraments as they can, keeping the faith as they can—until the Holy Spirit leads our shepherds from the halls of power and privilege and clothes of watered silk and lace to the homes of the faithful.

Let us, in the next few days, BE the church we want our Church to be: tolerant of ideas, open, respectful of time and ideas, welcoming to our sisters and brothers from all walks of life.

And let us come together on Sunday morning at a joyful celebration of the Holy Spirit and her presence at the Second Vatican Council.

Let us show the world what it means to be Catholic in the US—and what Catholicism can be in the United States.

Thank you.