



## FINAL STATEMENT

“An explosion of life.” This is how poet **Paul Mariani**, one of the **39 guest speakers** at the **11th edition of New York Encounter**, described what he saw happening at the Metropolitan Pavilion. More than **330 volunteers**, coming from all over the US at their own expense, made the Encounter possible and able to welcome, free of charge, **13,300 people** who packed **19 conferences**, visited **four exhibits**, enjoyed **three shows**, and dined at the **food court**. Besides the now popular **Kids’ Corner**, where children from 3 to 10 got involved in various activities, new this year were the **Professional Corner**, where visitors could meet with senior professionals in various areas and ask for career development advice, and **A Space of Encounter**, where people could know more about the life of Communion and Liberation that generates the Encounter.

The 2019 edition, titled “**Something to Start From**,” aimed to explore a distinctive trait of our humanity which is revealed by the very same unease we all perceive in front of the crisis of identity, the corrosive disunity, and a widespread demoralization in our society. It is not an idea to implement or an ideal to reach, but it is something already in us, a built-in feature of our humanity, marked, at its core, by a resilient expectation of a promised good. The Bible simply calls it “heart.”

Encouraged by warm greetings from **Pope Francis**, the Encounter opened with three powerful witnesses showing a new bud of life in places where none could be expected: in a prison in Brazil with no guards, where inmates do not escape because “none runs away from love”; in battered Aleppo, Syria, where a self-described simple housewife freely decides to remain and starts a catechesis for hundreds of children having no means to leave; on an Ivy League campus, plagued with ideological lockstep, where professors and students start a true dialogue. In summing up the three witnesses, Encounter President **Riro Maniscalco** said: “**Something** moved those inmates to remain, that housewife to build anew, that student to challenge the common mentality. It is the

phenomenon of this “something” that we will explore in these days. Can we start from it? Is it relevant for our challenging times? Can it provide the energy and clarity to walk in the journey of life without getting lost?

None of the speakers shied away from fully engaging with these questions, either speaking about two American icons: **Bob Dylan** and **Andy Warhol**, or addressing the issue of **loneliness** or the **education** of the young; either talking about possible life on the newly discovered **exoplanets**, or conversing on what makes a job interesting in today’s **corporate America**. Poetry, rock ‘n’ roll, and the human character were areas where the relevance of this “Something” was appreciated. Its importance was also mentioned in a dialogue between the U.S. nuncio **Archbishop Christophe Pierre**, historian **Austen Ivereigh** and **Fr. Julian Carron** on Pope Francis’ vision for a new evangelization. They all agreed that the challenge for the Church today is presenting Christianity in a way that can relate to, and reawake, that expectation present in everybody’s heart. In tackling this year’s theme, *NY Times* editorialist **David Brooks** spoke of his personal experience of being broken-open and how he discovered, in that very suffering, the depth of his heart and what it points to. The Encounter ended with two moving events: **Jenny Hubbard**, mother of Catherine Violet, murdered in the **Sandy Hook massacre**, along with **Dawn Ford** a survivor of that massacre, and **Enrico Petrillo**, **Chiara Corbella’s husband**, shared their experience of how a circumstance so tragic like a school shooting, or so painful like the death of a beloved wife, can become a new beginning in life if the cry of the heart is met by a loving presence. The *Encounter* also offered two original shows: “**A Love Supreme**,” featuring compositions by **John Coltrane** and “**Island of Peoples**,” a concert with voices from Ellis Island composed by **Gabriele Vanoni**.

Beside conferences and shows, there were four exhibits. The one illustrating the Encounter theme, in the footsteps of **Walker Percy’s *Lost in the Cosmos***, did not merely present it but enabled visitors, in a cleverly interactive way, to even **experience** it (as a young woman, after her second visit, said to the curator: “Now I want to understand, name, and honor the desire of my heart that I discovered visiting this exhibit”). People also enjoyed the exhibit on **Bob Dylan** and on the lives of three doctors, **Takashi Nagai**, **Giancarlo Rastelli**, and **Cicely Saunders**, who all valued their patients, until the very end, simply because of their existence. The fourth exhibit, curated by high-school students, was dedicated to Fr. Luigi Giussani’s understanding of the heart, “Something to start from.” More than 60 years ago he defined it as the place of the **original needs and evidences that makes us human, like the desire for happiness or meaning**. Invited to look at their own experience of these needs and evidences today, those students gave witness in the exhibit to Fr. Giussani’s proposition that what constitutes the human heart is absolutely irreducible and exclusive to each person and, at the same, universal and timeless.

At the end, the Encounter itself, with all its life, witnesses, presentations, and discussions, showed how **the heart** can truly be something that **everybody can start from** to discover one’s own **identity**, to engage in **relationships** rooted in the experience of a common humanity, and to rekindle those great **American ideals** of freedom and happiness which still excite the life of its people.

Maybe there is no better summary of this year’s Encounter than what **John Bartlett**, a volunteer retired fireman in charge of setting it up and tearing it down, said: “People at the Encounter were happy because, I believe, it is a **place where everybody’s heart found its home**.” See you next year!