



New York Encounter 2018: Final Statement

Almost **11,000 people** packed the Metropolitan Pavilion during the 10th edition of New York Encounter and enjoyed a weekend rich in conferences (19), shows (3), and exhibits (5), and full of encounters, good food, and smiles! But none of this could have happened without **366 volunteers** coming from all over the US on their own expense to make the Encounter possible and free for everybody.

Titled “An ‘Impossible’ Unity” and faithful to its proposed theme, the 2018 Encounter aimed to explore the causes of the fragmentation we see around and within us, and discover examples of what can re-generate unity in personal and social life. The theme acknowledged that unity, although desired, seems impossible nowadays, especially when confronted with the difficulty to establish and maintain relationships rooted in a shared human experience. Nevertheless, almost refusing to give in, the Encounter ended with a question: “**But what if unity is possible? How can it happen?**”

Sustained by a special blessing by **Pope Francis**, the Encounter opened with a powerful reminder that an unimaginable unity is indeed possible. NYPD Sergeant **Conor McDonald** recounted the life experience of his late father Stephen, who forgave the teenager who shot him and left him paraplegic for 30 years. At the end of his witness, a question was left to the public, which accompanied the journey at the Encounter: “What happened to Stephen and his family to allow such a unity in themselves and with others, even when they hurt them?”

In the Encounter’s remaining two days, **46 guest speakers** passionately engaged in one way or another with this question in subjects that ranged from economy to psychology, from art to medicine, from sociology to poetry, from politics to literature, from theology to education, from music to international development, and from cinema to history. Among them was psychologist **Paul Vitz**, who addressed a topic that was also witnessed in many other conferences: the presence of a true father is a key factor for unity within ourselves and, thus, with others. **Archbishop Silvano Tomasi**, former nuncio to the U.N. in Geneva, showed how economic development has to go hand in hand with integral human development. Sculptor **Etsuro Sotoo** spoke about the deep relationship he can live today with Antonin Gaudi simply by “looking at what Gaudi was looking at.” Musician and Grammy Award winner **Sandeep Das** shared his experience with the Silk Road Ensemble and how music inspires connections. **Michael Brescia**, founder of the Calvary hospital, witnessed to the profound unity of his life as a scientist, entrepreneur, doctor, and husband. U.S. Apostolic Nuncio **Archbishop Christophe Pierre**, **Sayed Al Kashmiri**, and **Joseph Weiler**, offered a Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish perspective on the relationship between God’s call and human identity as exemplified in Abraham, and gave a great example of true inter-religious dialogue. Historian **Mark Lilla** and sociologist **Amitai Etzioni** lively debated about the shared bond and ideals, if any, in today American society. Last but not least, in a panel on Dorothy Day, **Timothy Cardinal Dolan** offered glimpses of the unity between prayer and action that marked her life.

Throughout the weekend participants could dine at the all-volunteer staffed **food court**, while children could play in the **Kids’ Corner** or visit “**Father Abraham’s Tent: all are welcome**,” an exhibit especially designed for them and their families. There were three other **original exhibits** that helped illustrate the weekend’s theme: on **immigration**, with stories of a surprising unity between immigrants and people who decided to host them, on the **life and words of Dorothy Day**, and a photo essay by Joseph Weiler titled “**Moments of Dignity and Places with a Soul**.” After dinner the *Encounter* offered two original shows: on Friday, “**A Single Garment of Destiny**” on the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.; on Saturday, “**Fatherhood**” a new multi-media work from Jonathan Fields and Chris Vath.

The presentation of **Fr. Giussani’s biography**, along with the exhibit put together by university students on his life, provided the clearest example of how an ‘impossible’ unity can come about. Introduced by **Fr. Julián Carrón**, and accompanied by **Alberto Savorana**, author of the biography, six different people poignantly shared the story of their life-changing encounter with a man who, because of his faith, became their father. And everybody in the audience could see how what the speakers held in common — the exceptional encounter with Fr. Giussani and the story that followed — was stronger than their differences in nationality, cultural and social backgrounds, age, race, sex, and even religion.

As the weekend drew to its close, **Riro Maniscalco** reminded us that only the encounter with a human presence who loves us at our core — that truly corresponds to us — can make us discover who we are and what we have in common with others. He closed by quoting Fr. Giussani: “This presence can be a face in the crowd, a face like all the others yet so different from the others that, on encountering it, it seems that all things are simplified. You see it for an instant and as you walk away you carry the impact of that gaze within you, as if to say: **‘I would like to see that face again.’**”