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**To Accompany Young Adults in Joy and Hope in Finding Their Way Today:  
*Revitalizing Conference held in Hamilton, Ontario this week***

**[HAMILTON, ONTARIO, April 27, 2018]** Young ambassadors from McMaster University gave witness to the power of faith and religion in the lives of young people today at a conference held this week. Rachel D’Arsie eloquently spoke to a group of more than 100 priests, Sisters, Brothers and others who were attending a conference on accompanying young adults on coming to know and deepen one’s vocation in life. This conference of the National Association of Vocation and Formation Directors (NAVFD) was held in Hamilton, Ontario from April 22-25, 2018. With a focus towards the Youth Synod to be held in October 2018, the various speakers told their stories with an urgency expressed with hope and joy which was the theme for the conference.

Fr. Tom Rosica, CEO of Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation, got the conference off to a rousing start with weaving the story of how the upcoming Youth Synod came to be as a natural result of all the activities and events leading up to this moment.

Speaking of her experience working with young adults across Europe in her role as the Vice President of the European Vocations Service, Sr. Nathalie Becquart, xmcj, one of the keynote speakers, outlined the main elements for developing a culture of vocation in the context of today including an admonition that, *“whenever we attempt to read the signs of the times it is helpful to listen to young people and the elderly. Both represent a source of hope for every people. The elderly bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience, which warns us not to foolishly repeat our past mistakes. Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up to the future, lest we cling to a nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer lifegiving in today’s world.”* She then proceeded to inspire attendees with her reflection on the best practices and resources for animating a culture of vocation to promoting vocations.

The conference was then treated to presentations by the second keynote speaker, Cardinal Gérald Lacroix, the Archbishop of Quebec, who shared his pastoral insights about how to evangelize young adults as well as developing sound bases for priestly and religious formation. He noted that in initial formation, we need to find a way to help young people discover the treasure that is the word of God. Both keynote speakers emphasized baptism as foundational to all Christian vocations. They stressed the centrality of encountering Christ at a personal level as each person responds to his/her call to holiness.

A series of workshops inspired and gave practical suggestions to participants. Campus Ministry Coordinator, Ms. Erika Toffelmire of St. Jerome's University and Resurrection High School Chaplain Ms. Marianna Worth, both from Kitchener-Waterloo indicated that for young people, building trust and safety is extremely important to help them feel able to engage, and to be fully present in faith celebrations and activities. They also said that most youth want to see clergy, religious and lay leaders participate in the activities in solidarity with them: not just to lead but to Be!

Ms. Christina Mines, Director of Young Adult Ministry for the Diocese of Hamilton outlined four goals for effective outreach to Young Adults: connecting young adults with a) Jesus Christ, b) the Church, c) the mission of the Church in the world and d) a peer community.

Presentation Brother Denis Claivaz and Sister of St. Joseph of Sault Ste Marie, Costanza Romano, lead an interesting and interactive conversation during their workshop, 'Dialogue on Visibility: the habit and other ways of being visible'.

There was a panel consisting of newer members of religious communities sharing what attracted them to religious life and why they stay impressed attendees with the hope and joy they exuded in the midst of the joys and challenges of their lives and ministries.

Executive Director of the Religious Formation Conference in the USA, Sr. Ellen Dauwer also at the conference, said in relation to ongoing formation that it is, "*a human and spiritual attitude. It is a way of being in the world, open to the signs of the times: a thorough, honest reflection and discernment of our presence in today's world.*"

Participants were grateful for the presence of Bishop Douglas Crosby of the Diocese of Hamilton who supported the conference from the very beginning of the planning process.

This was the first time in its history that the conference offered simultaneous translation of English and French for major parts of the program in order to assist attendees from across Canada to participate more fully. This is an area where NAVFD plans to expand in the years ahead.

The vital and exciting Report on the recently completed Canada-wide Vocation Research Project was also introduced and will be unfolded in the weeks and months ahead.

NAVFD is the only national organization of persons/communities/dioceses across Canada whose main purpose is to foster a 'culture of vocation'.

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For further information about NAVFD and the conference itself, visit <http://navfd.info>.

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