

Meet the Mission Leaders

In August, when we first met Very Reverend Norbert Maduzia, Jr., E.V., D. Min, of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, we met him in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey with his parish flooded and his people suffering. We lingered with Fr. Norbert and his parishioners, to pray, to ponder the incredible loss, to allow the people to teach us, to touch us, to call us to reach out...

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A memory refresh: when we meet Fr. Norbert, we meet a native Houstonian, ordained in 1982, the pastor of a 3900-family thriving parish, the episcopal vicar of the Northern Vicariate, the co-chair of the ongoing formation of clergy committee, a facilitator and faculty member of NOCERCC programs, a past president of NOCERCC and a priest of the reality of this day and age, wearing many hats.

Fr. Norbert has attended many continuing formation convocations, retreats, gatherings and NOCERCC conventions. Among the more significant conventions in his memory took place in New Orleans. The theme was "Governance" and the sobering-highlight was the on-site visit to St. Gabriel's, a parish ravaged by Katrina. The pastor, staff and people retold their story to the visiting NOCERCC priests and participants. This people of God described the sense of helplessness, what they had learned, needed, gave, and what had emerged as "primary in the midst of pain." Fr. Norbert said that it had moved him to the core, as it did to so many of those priests who witnessed their strength, their compassion, their sense of loss and gain... The participants of that convention then returned to rest of their time together, touched to the core of their priestly humanity in ways yet to be awakened and revealed: called out in fresh and fierce ways through the compassionate and sturdy hands of God's Spirit.

A few years passed, then Harvey struck in Galveston-Houston, throughout the Southeast and beyond! Fr. Norbert said that "it was like what he had heard in New Orleans rose up from within him, as if he had received its wisdom through osmosis. He knew that he had to respond from the cries that he had heard in New Orleans: to connect, to pray together, to contribute to one another as the people of God: to live from our real identity and to emerge as a "real presence" of the God who hears the cries of his people and responds. For when, we lose our homes, our parishes, our gathering places, we must become that place where God and his people act as a community of faith, hope, and love... make real again the presence of God and the people of faith in New Orleans! So, using their parish Facebook page and other social media, Fr. Norbert gathered God's people to pray. As soon as a plot of grass rose up from the waters, 700 people appeared to pray while other prayed from wherever they could. Almost immediately he took them to the heart of their gathering place, the sanctuary of their parish church, through a YouTube video, where he showed them the devastation and gathered them together to pray and connect. Without any thought of its impact beyond his people, he found out that over 1.2 million had viewed this video. This storytelling done in love from love moved out into the beyond...to other places of devastation where besieged people were also praying and creatively responding to each other in love.

Fr. Norbert says that another major effect was the way in which the priests and pastors of Galveston-Houston reacted with each other...how are your people doing...what do they need...how can we help each other...all the structures and systems of the Archdiocese seeking ways to pray, to connect, and to contribute with others from elsewhere reaching out in prayer, connection, and through contributions of time, talent, and treasure.

As the waters receded, the hard work of repair, rebuilding, restoring what could be restored, and letting go of what only stood as obstacles to the promise of a new and renewed life began, not only in the homes, the parishes, the centers, of this archdiocese and its communities, but also within the presbyterate itself.



The ongoing formation committee for clergy met to look ahead to one of its major works: the biennial convocation which will be in May 2018. Fr. Norbert, having had the experience of New Orleans, now being embodied in his own beloved Galveston-Houston and in other neighboring dioceses, recognized once again, along with his co-chair, Fr. Sean Horrigan and other committee members, the foundational importance of continuing formation, and especially of the continued human formation that supports a more integrated spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual priestly identity and ministry. The convocation, now in its planning stages, will begin with the “storytelling” that marked the New Orleans convention. So far, three images seem to be emerging: the Spirit hovering over the waters, the Word made Flesh and dwelling among us, and the flourishing Spirit renewing with hope.

Gather, Tell the Story, Pray, Connect, and Contribute from their real identity, embodying more fully the likeness of the God in whose image they are made, embodying more fully the likeness of the Christ in whose priesthood of mercy they live and move and have their being...with the daily concerns that God’s people face in their lives, much less the disasters and horrors that strike in the night, the priests of the ongoing formation committee of Galveston-Houston again endorse the critical mission of their own ongoing formation. “ Too much is at stake, not to take this journey,” says Fr. Norbert.

In the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston a well-structured support system emerges from the “Secretariat for Clergy Formation and Chaplaincy Services” headed by the Vicar for Clergy. To see how the ongoing formation of clergy committee is integrated within the larger mission of the Secretariat, please go to: <http://www.archgh.org/offices-ministries/clergy-formation-chaplaincy-services/>

The ongoing formation committee itself: sponsors lectures, workshops and conferences that provide information that assists the priests and permanent deacons to continue their development in the areas of theology, scripture, homiletics, and pastoral care. The committee also collaborates with other Archdiocesan departments for days of prayer and workshops. The Archdiocese has also instituted a “Welcome to the Archdiocese” experience for newly ordained and newly arrived priests, working with the Vicar, which meets every other month for one year.

They offer a biennial convocation: <http://www.archgh.org/news-data/texas-catholic-herald/priests-return-to-roots-gather-for-biennial-convocation/> Read about the last gathering in 2016. Take note, Fr. Norbert tells us: they always gather in Galveston, the place of their beginning, enabling them to connect and be touched by their roots, at their core. They gather with a felt sense of their history: to tell their stories, to pray, to connect, and to continue contributing in their priestly ministry, no matter what comes, what strikes, what lurks or what emerges from the darkness. They bear the Christ-mission of mercy and love with and for their people and each other. Let us all pray for the Church of Galveston-Houston as they go forward in faith from such devastation!

For more insights on the mission of continuing formation and its committee in Galveston-Houston go to: www.archghpriests.org