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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Courage gives hope in “difficult days”, says Toronto prelate ahead of conference**

(Trumbull, CT) Toronto’s cardinal archbishop praised Courage International as a “sign of hope” ahead of its upcoming Annual Conference on the theme: “Courageous Friendship: Inspiring Hope and Renewal”.

“In these difficult days Courage is a great sign of hope,” said Cardinal Thomas Collins, who will be attending the July gathering for men and women who experience same-sex attractions (SSA) and loved ones of those who identify as LGBT.

The 2019 Annual Conference will be held at the **University of Saint Mary of the Lake** (also known as **Mundelein Seminary**) in Mundelein, IL from **July 18-21, 2019**.

“Learning how to foster chaste, generous friendships is central to our work at Courage, but is also essential for the Christian”, said Father Philip Bochanski, executive director of Courage International, in reference to the theme of the conference.

“Every year, our Annual Conference often feels more like a family reunion than a conference. It's a special opportunity for our members to reconnect with old friends, and to form new friendships with those who understand their experience and their journey”, Father Bochanski continued.

“In our friendships, we learn to love others because God loves them, in the same way that God loves them. When we do this, we find that we’re drawn out of ourselves in a way that gives us the ability to grow, and to start to live with the life of Christ”, Father Bochanski said.

The main conference will be preceded by a “**Clergy Day**” on **July 17** for priests, deacons, and religious who wish to receive formation in how to minister to persons who experience SSA.

Courage member and well-known young adult blogger, **Avera Maria Santo**, and *The Catholic Man Show* hosts, **Adam Minihan** and **David Niles**, are among the featured speakers at this year’s event.

**Father Michael Gaitley**, MIC, Director of Evangelization of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception in Stockbridge, Mass., will also be giving an address.

Other confirmed speakers include the director of the Catholic Women’s Forum, and member of the board of directors for Courage International, **Mary Rice Hasson**; FOCUS’ regional director for parish outreach, **Kelsey Skoch**; co-founder and president of The King’s Men, **Mark Houck**; and Courage member and author, **David Prosen**.

Conference participants will have the opportunity to attend talks on various topics, including pastoral ministry, psychology, and understanding family members and loved ones who experience SSA.

The event will include daily Mass, an evening of all-night Eucharistic Adoration, and the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Simultaneous translations from English to Spanish will be made available.

Additional information and updates will be available at the event page:

[www.couragerc.org/event/annualconference2019/](http://www.couragerc.org/event/annualconference2019/)



## NOTES FOR EDITORS:

### *Background on Courage International and Encourage*

**Courage International, Inc.** is an apostolate of the Catholic Church which offers support to persons experiencing SSA who have chosen to live a chaste life. It was founded by Fr. John Harvey, OSFS at the request of the late Cardinal Terence Cooke. The first Courage chapter meeting was held in New York City in 1980, and it was this initial group which developed the Five Goals of Courage: Chastity, prayer and dedication, fellowship, support, and good example/role model. Fr. Harvey was succeeded as executive director by Fr. Paul Check, who held the position from 2008-2016. Fr. Check was then succeeded by Fr. Philip Bochanski in January, 2017. Today, Courage has more than 150 chapters in fourteen countries. Courage and EnCourage received canonical status in the Roman Catholic Church as a diocesan clerical public association of the faithful on November 28, 2016.

**EnCourage** is an apostolate under the Courage umbrella which provides support for families and friends of persons who identify as LGBT, and aims to teach them how to reach out to their loved ones with compassion and understanding. The group was first formed in 1987 by families in search of guidance for supporting their loved ones who experience SSA. In 1992, this group adopted the name EnCourage. Currently, they have more than seventy-five chapters in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, Italy, Singapore, and the United Kingdom.

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