

“INSPIRED BY FAITH, COMMITTED TO ACTION”

45th Anniversary Celebration
Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investments
Tribute to Michael Crosby, OFM Cap, founder
Marquette University, Oct. 16, 2018

I am deeply grateful to Frank Sherman for asking me to be the keynote speaker for this 45th anniversary celebration of the Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investing. There's a double focus to this evening: first of all we're paying tribute to my brother, Fr. Mike Crosby, but secondly, we're paying equal tribute to the group he helped establish: the Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investing. It's one year since Mike completed his life's journey; it's 45 years since the Seventh Generation Coalition began their journey for justice – and unfortunately, that journey will never be completed.

By coincidence, the day I began working on this talk, I received an email reporting on the opening of the third Annual Vatican Conference on Impact Investments. Like Seventh Generation Investors, Impact Investors endeavor to use the finances of institutions to generate social and environmental change in keeping with the gospel. An equal goal for them is to bring about financial return for those who participate in them. There is nothing wrong with this – and sometimes that actually happens for Seventh Generation Investors as well. But financial gain has never been an equal primary goal for you. By sharing your investment portfolios you strive to bring about conversion on the part of corporations who, consciously or unconsciously, engage in practices contrary to the gospel. In doing this you are simply being faithful to your own Gospel vocation, endeavoring – often against great odds – to bring about the Kingdom of God more completely on earth as it is in heaven.

Let me repeat those last words: “Trying to be true to the Gospel vocation, endeavoring, often against great odds, to bring about the Kingdom of God more completely on earth as it is in heaven.” Isn't that statement the common thread that unites the two focuses of this evening? First of all, isn't it an almost perfect description of who Mike Crosby was – this Capuchin Franciscan priest who simply tried to be true to his Gospel vocation, endeavoring (often against great odds) to bring about the Kingdom of God more completely on earth as it is in heaven? And secondly, isn't that an almost perfect description of what you SGI members have been struggling to do for the last 45 years?

In the first part of this keynote address I want to speak Mike Crosby's Gospel witness; the second part will be devoted to the Gospel witness of the Seventh Generation, which was always so dear to Mike.

One of Mike's later books (which I believe was especially close to his heart) was FINDING FRANCIS, FOLLOWING CHRIST. In the preface he wrote,

I admit to feeling quite inferior to the many Franciscan scholars who have dedicated their lives to this study. As I read the popular works of authors like Sabatier, Jorgenson and Chesterton, along with the works of those that represent the historical-critical method, I acknowledge that I can only stand on their shoulders. And yet I realize that the seeds of this work have been incubating for many decades. They go back at least to July 15, 1959, the day I consciously chose to become a Capuchin Franciscan.

That's an interesting little tidbit he tells us about himself, don't you think? He remembers the exact day that he made his vocational decision. But he tells us nothing of what happened on that day, July 15, 1959, to make him "consciously decide to become a Capuchin Franciscan." On this October 16th day of tribute to Michael Crosby I would like to fill you in "on the rest of the story" about July 15th, 1959. It reveals so much about the Gospel person Mike was and captures so beautifully the theme of our conference: "Inspired by Faith, Committed to Action."

Most of you know that just before Christmas of 2016 Mike was diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus. He faced the diagnosis with unshakable faith and trust, absolute peace and tranquility. After a round of chemotherapy he underwent a seven hour surgery – on Easter Tuesday, April 18. The over-confident surgeon told me he had gotten everything. Mike would have ten more years to live and would die of something completely unrelated. Six weeks later, on June 4, Mike had a CT scan which surprised him with the news that the cancer had returned with a vengeance. It had spread throughout his body and he would have only four to six months to live.

That was definitely not good news, but both of us were happy that he'd be spending his hospice time at St. Bonaventure's, the Capuchin community in Detroit where I live. Our rooms, in fact, were right next to each other. His peace and tranquility only grew as he became increasingly eager to embrace Sister Death. When July 15 arrived, I wasn't remembering that this was the day in 1959 he "consciously chose to be a Capuchin Franciscan." What I was remembering is that it was the feast of St. Bonaventure, our community's patronal feast. Thinking of that, I told him, "You know, Mike, this would be a good day to die!" His eyes twinkled and with a big smile he said from his bed, "This would be a fun day to die, too!"

So he reminded me of the story once again. It actually began weeks, maybe even years, before July 15th, 1959. During his high school years Mike felt a constant urge to become a priest, but just as constantly tried to stifle it. He became over-absorbed in as many school and community activities as he could. Sometimes those activities involved beer parties, and that bothered my parents a great deal. In spite of all his attempts the tug from God would not leave him. After graduation he almost angrily capitulated by deciding to go to our Capuchin college seminary at Mt. Calvary. He would check out the priesthood, but the idea of becoming a Capuchin was not at all part of the picture. Feeling overly-guilty for the anguish he had caused our mom and dad, he thought he should join a religious order that worked primarily with young people, so he could save them from the absolutely awful adolescence he had had!

At the end of his first year at Mt. Calvary, in mid-June, he took a trip out East with my Mother to visit two of these communities. On their way home they visited me in Indiana, where I was studying as a young Capuchin friar. The two of us went for a walk. During most of it he was extolling the glories of these religious communities, the beauty of their mission and goals. When he finished, he asked, "So what is the mission, goal of the Capuchins? What are you guys trying to do?" I replied, "Well, nothing as specific as those communities. All St. Francis wanted to do was to live the Gospel as faithfully as he could. In the first line of our Rule he tells us, 'The rule and life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of own, and in chastity.'"

My reply didn't sound very dramatic or earth-shattering to me, so I couldn't blame him if he was not impressed. He went inside and took a nap. Nothing more was said. He and my mother left for home shortly after. Some weeks passed and he still hadn't made a decision. On July 15, shortly after breakfast he told my mother, "I'm taking the car and going to church – and I'm not coming back until I decide what Order I'm going to." He drove to our parish church, St. Patrick's in Fond du Lac.

After making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament he went over to the Blessed Virgin's altar and sat down before her. On a pad of paper he wrote down the names of the communities he had visited, along with the Capuchins. He made columns for "Positive" and "Negative" with regard to each group's mission, goals and purposes. He found numerous positive elements to write under the other communities but the only thing he found to put down for the Capuchins was what we had talked about on our walk: "Live the Gospel." Much to his surprise this is what he kept coming back to – until it was the only thing. He knew the decision was made. He stood up from his prayer feeling light and free and grateful -- and drove home.

My mother was upstairs when he returned, so Mike shouted up to her, "Mother, I made up my mind. I am going to join the Capuchins!" She replied, "That's fine, Mike! I'm happy for you. Now come up here and help me turn this mattress!" Throughout his life Mike delighted in frequently telling this story; it says as much about our Mother as it does about Mike. This is what he was referring to when he told me, "This would also be a fun day to die!" It's also what he was referring to when he wrote in the preface of his book on Francis, "The seeds of this book have been incubating in me for decades. They go back at least to July 15, 1959, the day I consciously chose to become a Capuchin Franciscan."

As I said, I knew this story but enjoyed that he reminded me of it again – on July 15, last year. After retelling the story, he said, "You know something, Dan? Everything I have done in my Capuchin life, everything I have written is because of that experience. All I've ever tried to do is just discover more and more the meaning of the Gospel and what it is asking of me and everyone else. That's my life."

I was awestruck; I was also humbled. I believe Mike never articulated this even to himself, much less to me or anyone else. In a flash, everything in his life came together for me. Some people called him a prophet, others called him a troublemaker – just the way they talked about Jesus. The negative criticism bothered Mike, but it never stopped him. All he was trying to do "in season and out of season" was to be faithful to what he had discovered in prayer at St. Patrick's Church that 15th day of July in 1959. For him that experience was not just a "neat," once-in-a-lifetime event. It was a life-transforming experience. Like Francis, he knew he was called to live the Gospel. That meant he had to know the Gospel and even more, he had to know the Jesus who brought the Gospel. Then he had to put his own flesh and blood onto what he learned – and finally, bring to as many people as possible the life-giving, life-transforming Good News he kept discovering.

As he progressed in this lifelong process of learning and living and loving, he began to call Jesus' Good News the "Kin-dom of God on earth." Anyone who knew Mike would have to agree: he was passionately in love with that "Kin-dom" and with the Jesus who initiated it. This Jesus revealed to us the community of the Trinity, where there is absolute equality and fullness of sharing between Father, Son and Spirit. At the core of the Good News is that we human beings are created in the image of this Trinity – and so we too are called to live in absolute equality and strive on earth for the fullness of sharing exemplified in the trinity. Only then will we be true to ourselves and our creation. No wonder some called him prophet and others a troublemaker!

Once again I have to say how appropriate it is that the title of this conference is "Inspired by Faith, Committed to Action," for truly that sums up Michael Crosby. And it all began that eventful day of July 15th, in 1959. As Paul Harvey would say, "Now you know the rest of the story."

But that same Gospel story continues to live, right here in you members of the Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investments. You too are "inspired by faith, committed to action."

Your lives too are centered on the Gospel and Person of Jesus. That's what impels you to be committed to the genuine Gospel action which SGI members participate in by collaborating as investors. It's one important way to bring about that "Kin-dom of God on earth as it is in heaven."

Just as Mike Crosby gave 58 years of fidelity to the Gospel call he heard on July 15, 1959, so you folks have had 45 years of fidelity to the Gospel call you have heard. As in Mike's case, so also here a bit of history will help us appreciate how significant your commitment has been for these 45 years. So let's go back 45 years, to 1973. The year before, in the midst of the Vietnam war and its glaring injustices, 280 Capuchins gathered in Assembly and almost unanimously committed themselves to a new direction. It was embodied in this statement:

Whereas we are trying to read the signs of the time as Capuchin Franciscans and are driven by the Gospel imperative for justice and peace. . .we propose a province-wide thrust toward justice and peace which will be implemented through education and conscientization.

Shortly before this, we had established in Milwaukee an Office for Justice and Peace. It very soon evolved into a collaborative effort between our Capuchin province and other religious communities, especially women's communities. Initially Mike was not part of this endeavor; he was stationed at our inner-city parish of St. Elizabeth's in Milwaukee where he experienced firsthand the injustices and inequalities that so many people of color suffer because of the sin of racism.

In the fall of 1973 Mike became a part of the J-P Office and very quickly focused on investments as a way to change structures that preserve and enhance these injustices. He wrote a small treatise entitled, CATHOLIC CHURCH INVESTMENTS FOR CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY which soon became a kind of "bible" for Catholic investors concerned about social justice. In it he said:

The reason why the Church should use its investments to promote corporate social responsibility flows from the basic evangelical mission of the Church itself: to preach and work for conversion of hearts, attitudes and action in order to free human beings from whatever individual and structural forms of oppression may control them and so create a community of liberated men and women living in reconciliation, justice and peace.

Several months before his death he put it more simply:

Stocks give you ownership. Ownership makes you responsible for the acts of a company. By owning shares, people can challenge the companies to convert, to bring about good news for the poor and the planet. That what we try to do with socially responsible investing.

In the fall of 1973, in a collaborative effort with two visionary School Sisters of St. Francis, Sr. Alphonsa Puls and Charlita Foxhoven, Mike formed what is now the Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investments. Originally, seven Midwestern Religious communities came together to form this coalition; over the course of time it has grown to a membership of over 25. It was the first Catholic coalition to join the newly-formed Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility for Investments based in New York – and over the course of time was recognized as one of its most influential members.

The fall of 1973 – and here we are, the fall of 2018: 45 years (nearly a half a century) of this Coalition being inspired by faith and committed to action. Rather than re-tell some of the significant stockholder battles that have taken place, milestones won or lost during these 45 years, I would prefer to highlight

four Gospel attitudes that have characterized your coalition since your beginning. IN our present age of destructive individualism, secularization and polarization, these attitudes are becoming increasingly rare. For that reason alone, they are increasingly important and vital if Jesus' Gospel message is not to be reduced to a group of self-serving platitudes.

I already referred to the first Gospel attitude when I spoke of the way this group was founded: it was a work of collaboration, not individual, solitary achievement. Collaboration between Mike Crosby and Alphonsa Puls and Charlita Foxhoven; collaboration between men and women, between different Catholic religious Orders and very soon, between Catholics, Protestant and Jews. Interfaith. Mutual respect, sharing of resources, gifts and expertise, transparency – all for a common good beyond individual self-interests: the good of those who too often are left behind, too often considered not as important as the rest of us.

All of us are familiar with St. Paul's words to the Ephesians about using our various gifts to build up the Body of Christ. He also urges the Corinthians: "When you assemble, one has a psalm, another an instruction, a revelation, a tongue or interpretation. Everything should be done for building up." (14:26). Paul is basically saying: work together so that you can build up together. In many ways, this describes perfectly the collaboration you have demonstrated in these last 45 years: working together to build together. It's the exact opposite of the self-referential attitude Pope Francis sees too often in the world around us. I thank you for challenging us with this essential Gospel attitude of collaboration.

The second Gospel attitude that has guided and formed you for these past 45 years is solidarity. Not only do you cooperate and share your gifts with each other, you do so because the Gospel calls you to be brothers and sisters to millions of people who are in need of those gifts. Solidarity. Inclusion. Empathy. Compassion. Equality. It's what St. Paul urges the Corinthians to have when he asks them to be concerned about the suffering people in Jerusalem:

I say this not by way of command, but to test the genuineness of your love by your concern for others. For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich. . . . Not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but that as a matter of equality your surplus at the present time should supply their needs, so that their surplus may also supply your needs, that there may be equality. (2 Co. 9:8-9, 13-14)

Solidarity. Becoming one with; feeling at-one with. Because we ARE all brothers and sisters, equally precious, equally deserving of a human, dignified life. Isn't this this solidarity simply be true to the Incarnation? Isn't this exactly the opposite of those who tell us to build walls, to shut others out – especially the poor and suffering -- and look out only for ourselves? How we need you to keep on challenging us with this Gospel message. Thank you for 45 years of solidarity with the poor and suffering of our world, including our earth itself.

Courage is the third Gospel attitude you have exemplified for the last 45 years. The world does not want to hear the Gospel message that the earth is not here for our profit and exploitation but our mother, to be cherished and shared equally with all people, especially with those who struggle and are pushed aside. To speak that Gospel truth to the world – to corporations and institutions whose bottom line is profit rather than people AND TO DO IT IN LOVE – the only way this can be done is with Gospel courage. In the Acts of the Apostles the Spirit gives this gift to timid and fearful, even cowardly disciples, and they trust it, act on it, are transformed by it. It's called parrhesia in Greek; the gift that impels them

to speak the Good News, knowing that it will often be rejected and they will have to suffer for it. In the earliest letter of the New Testament, 1 Thessalonians, St. Paul shares his own experience, and it's similar to that of Mike and all who know they must speak an uncomfortable word to others. Paul says: "Though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated. . .we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition" (2:2). In an interview Mike had with US CATHOLIC he said,

Christians don't get persecuted for their internal relationships with God. But when we make public our understandings of what God wants for the world, that's when the world will react violently and reject or persecute us.

Gospel courage. Integrity. Authenticity. Standing for the truth, speaking for the truth – and doing it in love. The exact opposite of self-advancement, catering to others, trying to please everyone, figuring out which direction the wind is blowing so I can determine where to stand and what to say. How the world, how our Church needs this Gospel courage. Thank you for portraying this gospel attitude so consistently in these last 45 years. Like St. Paul, you have done it many times in the face of great opposition.

The final Gospel attitude I thank you for is for your hope. Everything you have tried to do – sometimes with wonderful success but often with no visible success – everything you have done these past 45 years is because you are a people of hope, Gospel hope. You really believe in Jesus and his message. You really believe, along with Jesus, that the Kingdom of God (or as Mike would say, the Kin-dom of God) CAN come on earth as it is in heaven – and you know that the only instruments Christ has for bringing about this Kingdom, this Kin-dom is us. What a coalition we are – weak, ordinary, fearful, sinful people, but look at how God needs us and look at what God does through us! Hope! The world can be different! People can live as brothers and sisters to each other and to this beautiful planet of ours! Hope! What a gift!

In the midst of setbacks, darkness and downright opposition I thank you Seventh Generation people for never losing your Gospel hope. How we need people like you! You bring to my mind the only words I know by heart from Vatican II, from the Constitution on the Church: "We strongly believe that the future of humanity rests with those who are strong enough to give coming generations reason for living and reason for hoping." You are among those people "strong enough to give coming generations reason for living and reason for hoping."

God bless you for many years to come, my sisters and brothers. May your collaboration with each other, your solidarity with all God's people – especially the poor and suffering, your courage in the midst of opposition and your hope in the midst of darkness continue to bring light into the world, the promise that the Kin-dom of God is actually coming more completely on earth as it is in heaven. Through your example – and that of Michael Crosby to whom you were so important, may we all let ourselves be more inspired by faith, more committed to action.

Thank you.