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Preface

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PREFACE

As a fitting introduction to the 1982 proceedings, the eloquent homily given at the Mass for the annual meeting by the Most Reverend James A. Hickey in St. Matthew's Cathedral, Washington D.C., is reproduced herein.

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

The remarkable circumstances surrounding the arrest, flogging and subsequent release of Paul and Silas might well serve as a point of departure for attorneys gathered in convention! Yet I prefer to center our thoughts on that wonderfully consoling reality described in the Gospel of St. John—the presence of the Paraclete. Jesus returned to His Father in heaven that He might send us the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, of wisdom, love, courage. We have not been left as orphans overcome with grief; instead we have an advocate. The Gospel goes on to say that He will guide us along the way of all truth.

As attorneys dedicated to the welfare of the dioceses which you serve, it must be abundantly clear that this presence of the Holy Spirit is a reality we cannot overlook. The dioceses are not ordinary clients, not merely legal corporations, fashioned according to the laws of the several states. They are, rather, communities of believers in whom the Holy Spirit resides. They are the Church structured around their bishops, and through them with the Bishop of Rome. They are centers of worship and education in Christ. They are men and women, bonded together in faith, and dedicated to the service of their brothers and sisters. To them, property, institutions, programs are simply means of reaching out to serve the person of Christ, above all to serve Him in the persons of the poor, whether that poverty be of body or spirit. The dioceses you serve are indeed special clients; they are filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Risen Savior.

What an important responsibility, then, to know and analyze their needs. How necessary that you, as their attorneys, see their mission in its total dimension, spiritual as well as temporal. Coming together nationally you have a chance to sort out the problems recurring from state to state. And you have such a significant opportunity here, in a national gathering, to reflect on federal laws and regulations which have great impact on the local churches.

How important that you protect the free exercise of the rights and obligations inherent in the faith-filled communities you represent. Government must not be allowed to intervene in the free exercise of religion. Secular humanism must not become the established state religion. I submit, therefore, that you have a unique responsibility to be sensitive to our religious heritage and to be keenly alert to ways in which the free exercise of that

heritage is protected or threatened by federal and state laws or regulations. Education is a part of our faith commitment; it must not be so subject to state or federal rules that it cannot survive as an overtly religious activity. Health care is another rich part of our heritage. Again, we must not allow the often hostile hand of regulation or licensing to threaten our care for the sick or the needy. We must be free to exercise our faith; our faith commits us to works of education, concern for the needy, work for social justice, care for the ill. These and many more are at the center of our life of faith. We look to you, our attorneys and counselors, to alert the dioceses to these problems and to give that expert help and counsel we need so much.

But to serve the local churches you represent, there is a continuing need to work together nationally, significantly through the United States Catholic Conference. There is clearly need to coordinate your efforts so that a decision in one jurisdiction does not hamper the efforts being made in another. There is need to keep the national level informed of problems arising in the several dioceses, and thus, through cooperation, to achieve the basis of unified recommendations for the bishops of our country. Through the Conference we can help the Church at all levels throughout the nation.

All of this, my brothers and sisters, is not said to legal counselors concerned simply to reflect an organization of high ethical values and spiritual goals. The Gospel of today and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church has taken you to a different level of reality. As believing members of the Church you are aware that the Spirit of God is in our midst. It does not prevent human mistakes; it does not supply for human ignorance or laziness or even deliberate sin. But it does guarantee for us the reality of living truth, the saving power of the sacraments, and the guidance of shepherds to whom, with the Bishop of Rome, there is given the care of the churches and the certain teaching of Christ. Above all this, the Holy Spirit calls us to prayer, to seek the illumination of His grace and to rely on the strength of His constant presence.

I pray for you in the celebration of this Mass and in the meetings of these days, that as attorneys serving the dioceses of this country you be always men and women of faith. Use your God-given natural abilities to the limit of your resources and then trust in the supporting wisdom of the Paraclete.

Baptized in the life of God, strengthened through the Sacrament of Confirmation, renewed frequently or even daily by the Eucharist, you are indeed servants of a wonderful, spiritual, if sometimes mystifying client — the Church we love! Your service is a reality, your service is something we all need so much. And in the name of all my brother bishops I thank you for your competence and dedication.

May God strengthen you in your purpose and console you in your difficulties and may He kindle in you always the fire of His love.