

# 2017–2020 USCCB Strategic Plan



## English Logo



**ENCOUNTERING**  
THE MERCY OF CHRIST AND  
**ACCOMPANYING**  
HIS PEOPLE WITH JOY

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## Spanish Logo



**ENCONTRANDO**  
LA MISERICORDIA DE CRISTO Y  
**ACOMPAÑANDO**  
A SU PUEBLO CON GOZO

# Thematic Framework of the 2017–2020 USCCB Strategic Plan.

What is Christ asking of us as a conference of bishops and as a people of God?

In a time of change, challenge and opportunity, what is Christ asking of us as a conference of bishops and as a people of God? Our response to His call is the result of

more than a year of dialogue, discernment and work by the 16 standing committees, 18 subcommittees and 1 ad hoc committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). This document is not just a report, but an invitation to join the work of the Church at the national level in the United States.

It is also a moment to deepen our own relationship with Jesus and share the resulting hope and joy with the world. As Pope Francis said while meeting the bishops of the United States in September 2015, we now “turn once again to the demanding task – ancient yet ever new – of seeking out the paths we need to take and the spirit with which we need to work.”

Developing a strategic plan for an organization as diverse as our conference is a significant undertaking. The document includes more than 740 individual projects, each comprehensive and complex in their own right. Here again, the words of the Holy Father in September inspire as we “raise fully our gaze, constantly

toward the horizons which God opens before us and which surpass all that we ourselves can foresee or plan.”

In 2006, the members of the USCCB pointed the way to a new model of organizational design for the Episcopal Conference. That model began a transition from a committee-driven Conference to a priority-driven Conference calling for the shared priorities to be implemented through the Committee work. Essential to the implementation of the new model was the creation of a strategic planning process reliant on a pronounced culture of collaboration.

Through this process the mission of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops comes to life:

- Act collaboratively and consistently on vital issues confronting the Church and society.
- Foster communion with the Church in other nations, within the Church universal, under the leadership of its supreme pastor, the Roman Pontiff.
- Offer appropriate assistance to each bishop in fulfilling his particular ministry in the local Church.

In 2008, the Conference approved its first comprehensive strategic plan. A second planning cycle was undertaken for 2012-2016. The body of bishops recognized that only through coordinated collaboration can we be good stewards of God’s resources and ensure the hope of the Gospel reaches where it is most needed in our society.



Work on the 2017-2020 strategic plan began in November 2014 as the regional meetings of bishops captured recommended priorities. An individual survey was then sent to all bishops and the National Advisory Council was similarly consulted. The USCCB Committee on Priorities and Plans worked to collate the feedback and develop a list of priorities for consideration by the full body of bishops. The priorities were debated, refined and near unanimously approved over the course of two meetings of the General Assembly in June and November 2015. The various Conference committees then set about the task of writing the 2017-2020 strategic plan.

The result is a shared framework bringing together the diverse work of the Conference in the common will of the full body of bishops, guided by the Holy Spirit and grounded in the signs of the times. The goal is to offer a sustained, compelling witness to the power of Christ's love in the world. As we read in the Gospel of Matthew, "Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (5:16).

What follows, we pray, will chart a path to hope for all people in need of a loving embrace as they face the challenges of the world. Through this work, we will encounter

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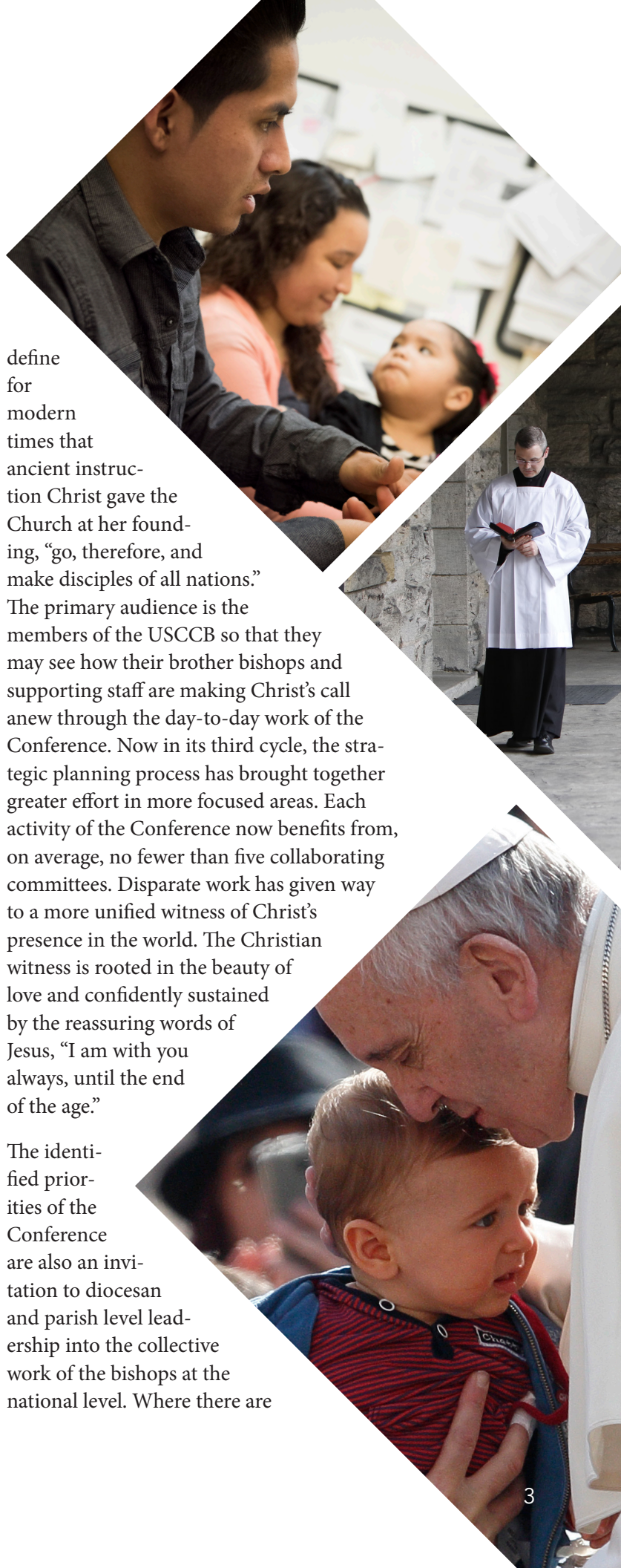
our brothers and sisters wherever they may be along life's journey, offer them love and support, and in turn, meet Jesus himself who will fortify each one of us for our own journey back to the house of the Father.

The intent of the 2017-2020 strategic plan is to

define for modern times that ancient instruction Christ gave the Church at her founding, "go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations."

The primary audience is the members of the USCCB so that they may see how their brother bishops and supporting staff are making Christ's call anew through the day-to-day work of the Conference. Now in its third cycle, the strategic planning process has brought together greater effort in more focused areas. Each activity of the Conference now benefits from, on average, no fewer than five collaborating committees. Disparate work has given way to a more unified witness of Christ's presence in the world. The Christian witness is rooted in the beauty of love and confidently sustained by the reassuring words of Jesus, "I am with you always, until the end of the age."

The identified priorities of the Conference are also an invitation to diocesan and parish level leadership into the collective work of the bishops at the national level. Where there are



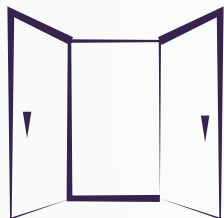


opportunities at all levels of the Church to work together, the strategic plan will truly find its deepest meaning. So too, the identified priorities are an invitation to the broader people of God, whose generosity and prayer give lifeblood to the apostolic life of the Conference and the Church. We joyfully labor together in the Lord's vineyard, each with our diverse talents and unique situations, joining to form the one body of Christ. The fruits of our labor we offer to nurture the spiritual and physical needs of our brothers and sisters.

Where can we be most effective in bringing hope where it is most needed? The bishops identified five strategic priorities, each with specific emphasis areas to further help refine operational planning. Moving forward, these priorities will guide the bulk of the Conference's work:



# Five Strategic Priorities



**Evangelization** to open wide the doors to Christ through missionary discipleship.

**Marriage and Family Life** to encourage and heal all families.



**Human Life and Dignity** to uphold the sanctity of life from conception to natural death with a special concern for the poor and vulnerable.



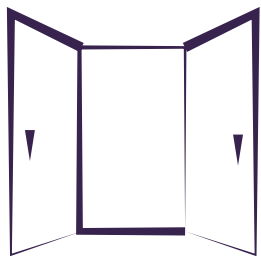
**Vocations** to nurture the call to the priesthood and consecrated life.

## Religious Freedom

to promote and defend the freedom to serve, witness and worship in the United States and abroad.

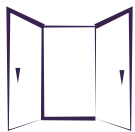


# Strategic Priorities with Emphasis Areas



## Evangelization

Open wide the doors to Christ through missionary discipleship and personal encounter

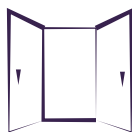


**Go into all communities** with the message of eternal salvation to awaken all God's people through a personal encounter and relationship with Jesus. This call to discipleship should be addressed particularly to the marginalized and those most in need of Christ's merciful love.

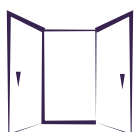


## Inspire youth and young adults

to enter into the joy of a sacramental relationship with Christ.



**Rekindle the fire** of Christ's mercy, reconciliation, and healing among those who no longer attend or have left the Church.



## Foster personal commitment

among Catholics to faithful weekly participation in the celebration of the source and summit of our faith, the holy Eucharist.



# Family and Marriage

Encourage and heal families; inspire Catholics to embrace the Sacrament of Matrimony



**Make the advancement** of healthy family life a central strategy for combatting poverty and for the promotion of social justice with special attention to the homeless, the poor, and immigrants.

## Reach out and accompany

struggling or broken families with the mercy and healing power of Christ.



**Invite and form** Catholic youth and young adults to embrace the vocation of lifelong, sacramental marriage.



**Provide meaningful, lifelong formation** for those who have entered into or seek the Sacrament of Marriage.



**Enrich the Christian family**, the domestic Church, and through it encourage the universal call to holiness.





# Human Life and Dignity

Uphold the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death with special concern for the poor and vulnerable



**Form joyful disciples** willing to proclaim in the public square the sanctity of human life and firmly reject the throwaway culture of abortion, euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide.



**Work to eliminate the darkness** caused by neglect, poverty, racism, and addictions including pornography.



**Continue to provide healing** for victims and ensure that safe environments are provided for children and young people through education, screening, accountability, and the ongoing promotion of public awareness regarding the scourge of sexual abuse throughout society.



**Study and apply** the principles of Catholic social teaching in service to all our brothers and sisters, with special emphasis on advocacy for the poor, disenfranchised, immigrants, and refugees.



**Joyfully invite** the imprisoned, disenfranchised, and neglected into the full life of the Church.



**Teach and advocate** about integral ecology, emphasizing environmental degradation and its impact on the lives of the most vulnerable.

# Vocations and Ongoing Formation



Encourage vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, and provide meaningful ongoing formation to clergy, religious, and lay ministers



**Assist dioceses** and eparchies, parishes, and families to develop a “culture of vocations” for the promotion of vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life.



**Provide ongoing formation** to enhance effective communication among all priests, deacons, religious, and lay ministers.



**Renew awareness** of the importance of a life rooted in prayer as central to the call to ministry.

# Religious Freedom



Promote and defend the freedom to serve, witness, and worship in the U.S. and abroad



**Defend the freedom** to live by our faith and have the courage to boldly proclaim Christ in the public square.



**Advocate for and assist** the global Christian faithful who, without the guarantee of religious liberty, are suffering persecution and martyrdom for living their faith.



**Proclaim the teaching** of the Church on religious freedom.



**Build a religious freedom movement** within and beyond the Catholic community.

# Highlights of the USCCB Strategic Plan

Each of the five priorities has its own spirit—its own call to make the world a place of missionary discipleship. What follows here is a snapshot of the diverse USCCB activities that support the priorities, both in spirit and in action.

It is worth noting that although our activities are customarily *managed* and *budgeted* by individual committees, subcommittees, and departments, the Strategic Plan requires that we do two things: (1) work collaboratively across divides and (2) ensure that our work—even when accomplished within a single unit—is supportive of the strategic priorities, as much as possible.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list but merely illustrative of the USCCB's breadth and depth of commitment to the Strategic Plan. For a comprehensive view into Conference activities, please consult the Catalog of Operational Plans provided as an accompanying document to this one.

First we present a synopsis of two major activities planned to take place in the 2017-20 USCCB Strategic Plan.

## The Joy of the Gospel in America: A National Convocation of Catholic Leaders.

In July 2017, the USCCB Committees on International Justice and Peace; Pro-Life Activities; Domestic Justice and Human Development; Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty; Evangelization and Catechesis; and Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth will jointly host *The Joy of the Gospel in America: A National Convocation of Catholic Leaders* in Orlando, Florida.

This conference, or “Convocation,” will be the venue for an unprecedented gathering of key leaders from dioceses and Catholic organizations from all across the United States, brought together in order to assess the challenges and opportunities of the Church in the United States, and engage in a strategic conversation under the leadership of the bishops.

Inspired by *Evangelii Gaudium*, informed by new research, communications strategies and proven models, the desired outcome of the Convocation is to form missionary disciples who are equipped and re-energized to share the Gospel, to act on Christ's command to ‘go out and make disciples of all.’ The convocation will include Catholic organizations, movements and apostolates, missions, religious institutes, agencies and institutions as key collaborators in this fundamental conversation with bishops.

Staff at the USCCB have prepared a brief and informal video that communicates the vision of the Convocation which can be accessed through the following link: [www.usccb.org/convocation](http://www.usccb.org/convocation).



July 1–4, 2017  
**Convocation**  
of Catholic Leaders  
The Joy of the Gospel in America





## V Encuentro on Hispanic Latino Ministry

The *V Encuentro* is a four year-long process, sponsored by the Cultural Diversity Committee/Subcommittee for Hispanic Affairs, which organizes and resources the basis for ecclesial reflection and action among all Catholics in the United States in the spirit of the New Evangelization. It begins at the grass-roots level and calls for the development of resources and initiatives to better serve the fast-growing Hispanic population in our dioceses, parishes, ecclesial movements, Catholic organizations and institutions.

### Theme:

- **Overall:** ‘Missionary Disciples: Witnesses of God’s Love’
- **Individual:** Individual themes of the five-week evangelization process and consultation (inspired by Pope Francis’ call to create a culture of Encounter, *The Joy of the Gospel* #24):
  1. Called to a loving encounter with Jesus
  2. With words and actions: Do it!
  3. Walking together with Jesus
  4. Bearing fruits of new life
  5. Celebrating the joy of being missionary disciples

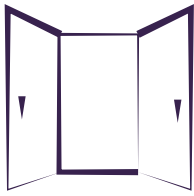
**Participants:** All leaders in arch/dioceses, parishes, lay ecclesial movements and Catholic organizations and institutions, as they are called to encounter Hispanic/Latino Catholics, with special emphasis on those living in the periphery of our society through missionary outreach, evangelization and consultation.

**Goal:** To discern ways in which the Catholic Church in the United States can better respond to the Hispanic/Latino presence, and to strengthen the ways in which Hispanics/Latinos respond to the call to the New Evangelization as missionary disciples serving the universal Church.

### Timeline:

- **2017:** Evangelization and consultation; Parish *Encuentros*; Arch/Diocesan *Encuentros*
- **2018:** Episcopal region *Encuentros* from January to June, with the national level *V Encuentro* taking place from Sept 20-23 in Grapevine, TX
- **2019:** Evaluation and reflection on the *V Encuentro’s* evangelizing and consultative process; development and distribution of proceedings and other resources
- **2020:** Continuing the Mission in episcopal regions, arch/dioceses, parishes, Catholic organization and institutions to truly and actively implement *V Encuentro* recommendations

Please access the following link for additional details on *V Encuentro*: <http://vencuentro.org/>.



## Evangelization

Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel.

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 20

The spirit of evangelization—bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation—is *to go forth*. Its movement is outward, spreading from the center that is Christ to the furthest reaches of our human world. USCCB activities that embody this outbound spirit of conversion include Divine Worship’s revisions to the *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, as well as Catholic Education’s work in campus ministry, inspiring youth with the joy of a sacramental life. Evangelization embodies Pro-Life’s *Call to Prayer* and *Nine Days for Life*, reaching out to the Catholic faithful in a national call to respect life. The visits to troubled areas of the world by International Justice and Peace are literal journeys outward, bringing the holiness of our mission to some of the most challenging places on earth. The upcoming planning guide for evangelization—which will include the work of six committees in addition to Evangelization and Catechesis—will provide diocesan and parish staff with best practices and guiding principles for discipleship formation. Likewise, the pastoral projects of National Collections, whether at home or abroad, foster an active, joyful life of faith among the Catholic faithful worldwide.

Thirteen committees/subcommittees have plans to directly support the Evangelization strategic priority, including 93 planned activities.

The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice.

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24



## Family and Marriage

The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life—the gift of God—can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth.

—St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 39

The spirit of this strategic priority is love and mercy. The USCCB commitment to the sacrament of marriage and the essential role of the human family spans our departments and activities. Some are more explicitly supportive of this strategic priority, such as the upcoming national

pastoral plan on marriage and family life. Others—such as Domestic Social Development’s focus on restorative justice, as well as their critical linking of poverty and family stability—are no less informed by the Conference’s support of this strategic priority. Policy work by Migration and Refugee Services in opposing anti-refugee legislation is designed to protect the families of the least among us. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development’s activities in support of housing for lower-income families, as well as the devastating impact of mass incarceration, will encourage and heal families across our dioceses. Cultural Diversity’s work to implement *Amoris Laetitia* in diverse families will enrich the domestic Church in all its human variety.

Ten committees/subcommittees have plans to directly support the Family and Marriage strategic priority, including 47 planned activities.

All family life is a “shepherding” in mercy. Each of us, by our love and care, leaves a mark on the life of others.

—Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 322



## Human Life and Dignity

Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 157

The spirit of the human life and dignity priority spans human life from conception to natural death, and it is uncompromising in its joyful solidarity. USCCB activities to uphold the sanctity of life include outreach on the issue of physician-assisted suicide, which continues to threaten human rights and medical ethics. Post-abortion reconciliation and healing—so badly needed in these times—will continue through the work of Project Rachel. At the same time, anti-trafficking initiatives by Migration and Refugee Services work to eliminate the darkness of modern slavery. The work of Child and Youth Protection continues to provide healing and ensure safe environments so that our Church is a light unto the world. A pastoral letter on race relations is being developed for the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., while rural poverty initiatives, engagement with Congress on human life issues, and work for immigration reform further apply the principles of Catholic social teaching.

Fourteen committees/subcommittees have plans to directly support the Human Life and Dignity strategic priority, including 170 planned activities

A human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development.

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 213



## Vocations and Ongoing Formation

Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence.

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 259

This strategic priority is primarily designed to encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life. It also supports ongoing formation of deacons and lay leaders. Through surveys, digital engagement, dialogue, and consultation, USCCB activities in support of this priority will lay the groundwork for a “culture of vocations.” Beyond the ongoing efforts of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, the Committee on Cultural Diversity consists of five subcommittees with specific targets to increase vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Likewise, the USCCB Communications Department will include several targeted activities that will share invitations to religious vocations, including Catholic News Service, Public Affairs, and Creative Services, all with the specific goal of increasing vocations.

Eleven committees/subcommittees have plans to directly support the Vocations and Ongoing Formation strategic priority, including 79 planned activities.

A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people, in the experience of fraternal love.

—Pope Francis, 2014 World Day of Prayer for Vocations



## Religious Freedom

No one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society.

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 183

The freedom to serve, witness, and worship—both here in the United States and abroad—is another important strategic priority. It spans USCCB committees and departments to proclaim and defend the Church's teaching on religious freedom. Advocacy work includes both international and domestic partnerships to protect the persecuted, as well as safeguard the freedom to serve according to conscience formation. Annual campaigns, especially the Fortnight for Freedom, draw together various departments in collaboration. Education and outreach not exclusively to the Catholic faithful aim to build a religious freedom movement across faiths.

Nine committees/subcommittees have plans to directly support the Religious Freedom strategic priority, including 70 planned activities.

Religious liberty, by its nature, transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families.

—Pope Francis, Address at Independence Mall