



Conference of Major Superiors of Men

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Catholic Men's Religious Superiors Update Child Protection Standards; Elect New Officers

(Denver, CO). “Why climb a mountain? Why embrace such torturous rigor, risk everything including one’s life, suffer from overexposure ...? To the mountain climber sometimes there is no other answer than that the adventure is there.” With those words, the Very Rev. Thomas Picton, CSsR, President of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men ([CMSM](#)) began his address to the Assembly of nearly 150 CMSM members, held in Denver, CO, August 1 – 4. The theme of the Assembly, which occurred jointly with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious ([LCWR](#)), focused on the theme, *On This Holy Mountain*. Father Picton went on to describe the “Holy Mountain” – as seen from scripture – as a sacred place, a sacred destination of pilgrimage, shrouded in mystery, a place precarious to climb.

Using this imagery, Father Picton described the challenges for religious institutes in this way:

“As we ascend the Holy Mountain we must remain in *communio* or perish on the way. I believe that our common future will be our willingness to share our charisms with one another and collaborate with one another; sometimes living a common life as we work together in education, i.e.; Jubilee and Cristo Rey Schools; colleges and universities, formation programs and theological unions; addressing the injustices of immigration; confronting the disintegration of biodiversity and the destruction of global environments; interfacing with the perpetual problems of the poor and the marginalized; and participating in the contemplative and spiritual movements that reconcile political, social and religious differences. As North America becomes a more secular, consumer, postmodern conundrum, we will, more than ever, be missioned together sharing our resources and personnel across institute boundaries sometimes under the same roof in conjoint or joint communities – missionaries, monks, and mendicants, men and women religious of every kind together with single and married lay associates. Even though our charisms will remain distinct, our bonds must become stronger than ever before if we are to accomplish the Mission of Christ.”

Keynote presenters at the joint assembly included Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, who spoke about “The Banquet of Faith” and Richard Rohr, OFM, whose presentation was entitled, “Religious Life as a Transformational System.” Gary Riebe-Estrella, SVD, concluded the CMSM Assembly with a talk entitled “On This Holy Mountain, but Which Mountain?”

Archbishop Gianfranco Agostino Gardin, O.F.M. Conv., Secretary of the Congregation for Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, was an active participant throughout the joint assembly. He presided at the principal Eucharistic liturgy on Sunday and during his homily, the Archbishop noted the questions posed in the Assembly’s program: “What are religious being called to embrace and to release? What are we being invited to see with new eyes and to hear with new ears? What conversions / transformations are needed in order to see with new eyes and to hear with new ears?”

Archbishop Gardin proposed three responses to these questions. First, he said that “*A call addressed to religious today, a needed conversion is that of once again becoming authentic seekers with a thirst for God.*” Secondly, he noted that “*The truest strength of religious life, that which is clearly evident in our founders and foundresses, is a passionate love for Christ, adherence to Him, the ability, to use the words of St Benedict, ‘to put nothing before Him’.*” And finally, the Archbishop said that “*religious life, in its commitment to follow and imitate Jesus, has always taken seriously the attention which Jesus paid to the poor and suffering. It has never forgotten that we will be judged on our love for those in need.*”

More than 140 leaders in CMSM attended a Pre-Assembly Workshop at which the practical application of the revised standards for accreditation for religious institutes in the CMSM *Instruments of Hope and Healing* program was presented to the CMSM membership. The new standards reflect the ongoing updates and experience of CMSM and child service organizations during the past four years and calls for continued pastoral care and accountability in the protection of children and young people from sexual abuse. The revised standards are the culmination of a year-long process of review and revision. They were approved by the CMSM National Board at its meeting prior to the Assembly.

At the membership meeting of the Conference, CMSM members elected the Very Rev. Thomas Cassidy, SCJ, major superior of the U.S. province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart in Hales Corners, WI, as President-Elect. The Very Rev. Thomas H. Smolich, SJ, who is President of the Conference of the ten U.S. provinces of the Society of Jesus, was elected as CMSM Vice President. In addition, CMSM Members elected two new at-large members of the National Board of Directors: Abbot Giles P. Hayes, OSB, of St. Mary Abbey in Morristown, NJ, and Brother Francis David, SC, provincial superior of the New Orleans province of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart.

During the course of the joint assembly, CMSM members, along with the members of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, considered and then unanimously approved a resolution to work for action on global climate change, (<http://cmsm.org/index.shtml>) stating that “*The Conference of Major Superiors of men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious jointly resolve to bring our own experience and charisms to the current conversation on climate change and into action for justice; to seek concrete ways to curb environmental degradation, mitigate its impact on the poorest and most vulnerable people, and restore right relationships among all God’s creation; and to foster a consciousness of care for God’s creation among all our members, colleagues, institutions and those whom we serve.*”