Catholic Religious Men’s Leaders Explore New Evangelization, Renew Child Protection Commitment, and Elect New Officers

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE (August 10, 2013). The annual assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), whose leaders represent more than 17,000 Catholic religious brothers and priests in the United States, was held August 7-10, 2013 in Nashville, Tennessee. At the opening event Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, offered the participants some remarks “on the all-important topic of the new evangelization.” He said that “this is what our leadership must essentially be about, to show Jesus to those who are crying out for salvation. This is what the new evangelization is all about, giving others the message of the Good News in a way that can be understood by a world that has lost its sense of values, that is being blinded by materialism, secularism, and indifference.”

The Rev. Andrew Ciferni, O. Praem., of St. Norbert’s College in De Pere, Wisconsin, provided daily spiritual reflections on the theme of the assembly, “The New Evangelization: Multicultural and Inculturated.”

In the first of three major presentations, Rev. Robert Schreiter, CPPS, of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, titled his talk “The New Evangelization as a Road to a Renewed Catholicity.” Father Schreiter’s plenary address was divided into three sections: the three challenges of the new evangelization, the role of religious life in the new evangelization, and the consequences for the new evangelization. He noted five points relating to the role of religious life: (1) the charisms of religious communities; (2) the international character of religious communities; (3) the capacity of religious communities for networking and cooperation; (4) “the two-fold quality of the exterior and interior aspects of religious life”; and (5) style and proclamation, “‘style’ in the sense of what we have traditionally called a ‘way of life’.”

Archbishop Gérald Cyprien Lacroix, ISPX, Archbishop of Québec, was the second major speaker at the assembly. His talk was entitled “The New Evangelization – Speaking God to Multicultural Secularism,” and he spoke to the participants about his experience at the recent Synod on the New Evangelization, as well as his own efforts at implementing the new evangelization in his own archdiocese. He noted that “to undertake this new mission, we are fortunate enough to count on thousands of devoted people and numerous organizations whose work breathes a new life into our communities. I often refer to them as being driven by a GPS, not as you may think a Global Positioning System, but the Great Prophetic Spirit who guides us towards Jesus Christ, as written by the Prophet Ezekiel: I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my ways (Ezekiel 36: 26-27).”

Arturo Chávez, the President and CEO of the Mexican American Catholic College in San Antonio, Texas, was the third major speaker at the 2013 Assembly. His talk was entitled, “The
New Evangelization, or a Latino Reformation?” and in it he said that “religious superiors and formators must deepen their knowledge and understanding of the differences among racial and ethnic groups present in their membership. We must begin with a personal inventory, an examination of conscience, and a profound realization of our own mindsets and prejudices.” He continued by saying that “for religious life in the United States to thrive, we must commit to fostering intercultural competencies in our members. In order to build a profoundly Catholic identity, religious communities must commit themselves to have an on-going process of inculturation.”

In his Presidential Address, the Very Rev. John Edmunds, ST, President of CMSM, said that he “would propose that it is the religious who are called to embody the prophetic aspect of Christian baptism in a pre-eminent way. Yes, both the clergy and the laity are not exempt from living out their prophetic vocations. But religious have the specific obligation to embody the prophetic dimension of their baptismal call as they exercise their different gifts, different ministries, different works.”

At a Pre-Assembly Workshop, participants considered the topic of Community Leaders: Witnessing Life and Hope. Presentations on the topic were presented by Brother Loughlan Sofield, ST, a member of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity and senior editor of Human Development magazine.

At the membership meeting of the Assembly, the members of the Conference considered and approved a new statement on child protection. Entitled Eleven Years of Work and Reflection by United States Male Religious on the Tragedy of Sexual Abuse within the Catholic Church, the four-page document recalls the work of the Conference and the child protection efforts of the religious communities of men through the Instruments of Hope and Healing program. In the statement there is a formal re-commitment to these efforts: “In 2013, as the leaders of our religious communities, many of which were specifically founded to work with children and young adults, we have a particular role to play in the protection of young people in the Church. We state once again that we abhor the sexual abuse of minors, and we realize and apologize for the distinctive pain caused when our members are its perpetrators. While we have not always responded perfectly, we remain committed to meeting the highest standards of prevention, outreach, evaluation and supervision.”

During the elections which were held at the membership meeting of the assembly, CMSM members chose the Very Rev. James Greenfield, OSFS, as President-Elect of the Conference. He will begin a two-year term as President at the conclusion of 2014 Assembly. The Very Rev. Carl Chudy, SX, was elected to a three-year term as an At-large Board Member.

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) supports and offers resources for U.S. leaders of Catholic men’s religious institutes. CMSM promotes dialogue and collaboration on issues of religious life as well as peace and justice issues with major groups in church and society. There are more than 17,000 religious priests and brothers in the United States.