Five-Year Strategic Plan Embraced by Catholic Religious Men’s Leaders as They Install a New President

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA (August 9, 2014). 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 6–9, 2014, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. At the opening event, participants received a message from Cardinal João Bráz de Aviz in which the Cardinal suggested eight questions for the member institutes of the conference to reflect upon during the forthcoming Year of Consecrated Life. The questions begin with these: “At what point are we in regard to the return to the sources of every form of Christian life and to the founding charisms of the institutes? Have our institutes adapted in an evangelical way to the changed conditions of the times? Is following Christ, as taught by the Gospel, the fundamental norm for us, the supreme rule?”

The Rev. Daniel Horan, OFM, of the Franciscans’ Holy Name Province in New York, provided daily spiritual reflections on the theme of the assembly, “Fifty Years of Perfectae Caritatis: Communio and Community.” Each day he commented on what he called the “Evangelical Qualities” of religious life, namely, foolishness, worldliness, joyfulness, and bodiliness.

In the first of three major presentations, the Most Rev. John Corriiveau, OFM Cap., Bishop of Nelson in British Columbia, Canada, titled his talk “A Spirituality of Communion and the Mission of Religious Life.” In his plenary address, Bishop Corriiveau said that “the church is a communion which finds its dynamism and its force in the mystery of the Holy Trinity” and “the unity of the Trinity is relational, not structural!” Consequently, he continued, “we do not image God in our individuality, but in our relationality!” Therefore he advanced that “the spirituality of communion must spawn a similar renewal in the church today giving birth to new ecclesial movements and religious congregations. Existing ecclesial movements and religious congregations must also renew their spirituality and mission in light of the communal identity of the church.”

Sister Patricia Wittberg, SC, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, was the second major speaker at the assembly. Her talk, “Building Community in Twenty-First Century Religious Life,” outlined a sociological perspective about fostering community within religious life. She explored the parameters between a healthy form of common life and a balanced sense of self, where the individual’s gifts and talents contribute to the overall richness of community life.

The Rev. Mark Francis, CSV, the President the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois, was the third major speaker at the 2014 Assembly. His talk was entitled, “Navigating the Tension between Mission and Communio since Perfectae Caritatis,” and in it he said that “the tension that I will speak about navigating…is about the mission that flows from our baptism and especially our religious profession that belongs to the charismatic/prophetic dimension of the church and how this fits into our relationship with diocesan and parish structures of the ‘institutional Church.’”
the reality of the conferences of major superiors as a collaborative resource in *Perfectae Caritatis* 23, Father Francis noted that “it is interesting to read that the purpose of these conferences of major superiors was not only to include a place for dialogue between religious communities, but to help to deal with issues of ministry and mission in the local church through a ‘suitable coordination and cooperation with episcopal conferences,’” leading to the document, *Mutuae Relationes*, in 1978.

In his final address as President of CMSM, the Very Rev. John Edmunds, ST, posed the question: *What do we mean when we say “WE RELIGIOUS?”* To which, he responded, “Religious are those whose lives only make sense in light of our passion to live for God. Religious respond to the call of God together as communities of prayer. Religious bring the grace and mercy of God to those who feel cut off or alienated in the circumstances of their lives. That is who WE are.” Father Edmunds related his words to the work of CMSM by saying that, as a religious leader, CMSM has provided information, inspiration, and both consolation and commiseration.

Sherry Weddell gave the presentations at a pre-assembly workshop entitled, “Communities of Intentional Disciples: Exploring the Path to Knowing and Following Jesus.” She is co-founder of the Catherine of Siena Institute (CSI) and author of a recent book, *Forming Intentional Disciples – The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*.

At the membership meeting of the assembly, the members considered and approved a revised Mission Statement and a Five-Year Strategic Plan for the Conference. Entitled, “*New Energy… Common Voice – A Strategic Plan for Action, 2014-2019,*” the revised Mission Statement affirms that CMSM “as the common voice, …speaks regionally, nationally, and internationally, independently or in concert with other groups;” and “as the primary common resource, it serves major superiors and their councilors in their role of leadership in their own communities and in the conference as a whole, especially in promoting greater fidelity and more effective witness to the Gospel ideal, with special attention to issues of justice and peace.”

During the elections which were held at the membership meeting of the assembly, CMSM members chose the Very Rev. Bro. William Boslet, OSF, Superior General of the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn, as Vice President of the Conference. He begins a two-year term. Bro. Larry Schatz, FSC, Provincial for the De La Salle Christian Brothers of the Midwest Province, was elected to a three-year term as an At-large Board Member.

During the concluding Eucharistic Liturgy of the Assembly, the Very Rev. James J. Greenfield, OSFS, Provincial of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, Wilmington-Philadelphia Province, was installed as President of CMSM. Prior to his present ministry as provincial superior, a position he has held since January 2008, he served as its assistant provincial and director of vocations, formation, and Salesian programs. Father Greenfield also serves as chairman of the board at Salesianum School and Nativity Preparatory School, both in Wilmington, DE, and The Washington Theological Union in DC. He is also a trustee on the boards of Father Judge High School and DeSales University. Born in Philadelphia, PA, he now lives with his local Oblate community in Wilmington, DE.

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*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.*