Religious Men’s Leaders Celebrate the Year of Consecrated Life, Elect Officers, and Approve Resolution on Climate Change

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA (August 8, 2015). 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 5–8, 2015, in Charlotte, North Carolina. At the opening event participants heard the first of four spiritual reflections presented by the Rev. Daniel Horan, OFM, of the Franciscans’ Holy Name Province in New York, who provided daily spiritual reflections on the theme of the assembly, “Celebrate the Year of Consecrated Life: Gratitude, Passion, Hope.” Beginning with a reflection on the name of God in the third chapter of the Book of Exodus, Father Horan said that “God’s eternality is central to the name of God – and fits well with this week’s assembly theme of ‘Gratitude, Passion, and Hope’ as we celebrate the year of consecrated religious life. When God explains to Moses what the Divine Name actually is, God invokes the past, the present, and the future in a way that reflects both how God transcends our time and also how God is immanently present within our time.” On each of the following days, he then looked at how religious could embrace gratitude, passion and hope in their lived-out experiences as religious.

In the first of the two keynote addresses at the assembly, the Most Rev. Joseph Tobin, CSsR, Archbishop of Indianapolis, delivered a presentation on behalf of Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. In the talk entitled, “The Renewal of Consecrated Life in the Light of the Second Vatican Council – Contemporary Challenges,” the Cardinal explored the theme of the assembly by referring back to two documents of the Council, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) and the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (Perfectae Caritatis), as well as the 1996 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Consecrated Life of Saint John Paul II (Vita Consecrata). The Cardinal told participants that “it is a good thing to reiterate the general principles for a proper renewal of the life and discipline of Religious Institutes, Societies of Apostolic Life, and Secular Institutes, which the Council laid down 50 years ago, and see what progress has been made so far. We constantly need to go back to the sources of Christian life, to the primal and original inspiration of our Institutes, and learn how to adapt to contemporary circumstances.”

The Cardinal also encouraged the participants to remember that “now more than ever, the presence of consecrated women and men in the Church and the world can help contemporary culture ‘not to be afraid of happiness.’ With their guidance, this wish and goal can be brought to a deeper level, provided that consecrated men and women themselves are happy and fulfilled human beings, who testify to the fact that following God and living the Gospel is indeed a self-fulfilling experience.”
Dr. Massimo Faggioli, Assistant Professor of Theology at the University of St. Thomas (St. Paul, MN), was the second major speaker at the assembly. His talk was entitled “The Ecclesiology of Vatican II as a New Framework for Consecrated Life.” Distinguishing the space of religious from the role of religious after Vatican II, Dr. Faggioli said that “the ecclesiology of Vatican II opens a new path for the role of the religious in the Church but mostly in an indirect way – for the spaces Vatican II opens are for the Church in general without a specific role for the religious. In this sense there is a precise historical-theological turn in the ecclesiology of Vatican II that is difficult to reconcile with the role of the religious.”

In his address to the assembly as President of the Conference, the Very Rev. James J. Greenfield, OSFS, summed up his report and reflections on the “State of the Conference” by saying that “the ambiguities of life abound. How we respond to them as consecrated men obviously calls forth a prayer and discernment that brings us to address a key question … … when discussing a sufficiency mentality. What is enough for me, for us, for our congregations? Certainly, God’s mercy is enough. We are enough. Our confreres are enough. And, perhaps most of all, Jesus is enough.”

A pre-assembly workshop was entitled, “Processes of the CDF in Cases of Grave Delicts,” was led by Msgr. John Joseph Kennedy of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as principal presenter. Co-presenters were Sister Sharon Euart, RSM, Executive Director of the Resource Center for Religious Institutes and the Rev. Paul Golden, CM, Director of Vincentian Canonical Services.

At the membership meeting of the assembly, the members considered and overwhelmingly approved a resolution on climate change entitled “Cherish All of Creation.” The resolution states: “The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) resolves to use both our individual charisms and experience as religious leaders in order to enter into the conversation on environmental degradation and to transform our practices to cherish all of creation, particularly responding to the urgent call for action on climate change.”

During the elections which were held at the membership meeting of the assembly, CMSM members chose the Very Rev. Brian Terry, SA, Minister General of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, as President-Elect of the Conference. He will be installed as President at the conclusion of the 2016 assembly. The Very Rev. Joseph Rodrigues, SDS, Provincial of the USA Province of the Society of the Divine Savior (Salvatorian Fathers and Brothers), was chosen as Vice President and he begins a two-year term. The CMSM membership elected four At-Large members of the National Board: the Rev. James Gannon, OFM, Provincial Vicar of the Franciscan Province of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the Very Rev. Timothy Kesicki, SJ, President of the Jesuit Conference of the United States; Brother Patrick Sean Moffett, CFC, Councilor of the Province Leadership Team of the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers – North America; and Brother Daniel P. Wisniewski, OSFS, Provincial Councilor of the Wilmington – Philadelphia Province of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales. They each begin a three-year term.