FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

As I write my column for this summer edition of the Mountaineer, we recently celebrated the feasts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. How much Jesus loves each of us individually, not just as part of the “everybody” that he “has” to love, but very personally. You were chosen by the Father not only to be born, but to be his, and to belong to him in a very special way. His love for you is unique, unrepeatable and forever. What a meditation we could have on that!

Sadly, I believe many people today do not believe that they are totally accepted by Our Lord just as they are. In some ways Jesus has a bad memory, thank goodness. He forgets our sins and failings as soon as they are forgiven, and sees in us who we can be if we let ourselves be transformed by his love.

His mother is the great model for us in this regard. As we look at her Immaculate Heart we get a glimpse of our Lord’s great plans for human beings. Of course, we will never reach her level of love and holiness, but she wants to take our hand and become our partner in the journey on that road of sanctity.

The theme for our National Meeting in September reflects these ideas. “The Courage to Accept Acceptance – Being in the Moment!” Yes, we need courage to accept God’s love right today, to accept the fact that he embraces us just as we are. Too many of us are victims of the heresy that we have to be good in order to win God’s love. Nope. Uhuh. Not ever. His love comes first and then his goodness flows into our hearts so that we become better in him. He is the one who is good; we just reflect his goodness.

May the Holy Spirit fill your hearts and souls with the experience of just how much you are loved by your Father in heaven, today, as you are, where you are.

Wishing you a relaxing and refreshing summer,
Marcia Vinje

God Bless America!
A note: I am using founder as a generic term to include the multiple combinations of founders of secular institutes: founder, foundress, co-founders, founding group, etc.

Follow Up.

The accurate and complete summary, in the fall 2017 Mountaineer, of the keynote at the annual meeting, stated that “the founder’s charism (of foundation) ends with the founding of the foundation.” Which is true. The reader might be left with the question which was raised in the Q&A. What about the founder? Does the founder continue to have a role regarding the institute?

The founder not only has the charism of founding but also a prophetic one. The prophetic charism inspired the foundation and the spirituality proper to the Institute. It’s the founder’s prophetic vision that anchored the institute on Christ and responded to an unmet need in the Church or in the society. The prophetic grace infused the original inspiration.

The founder’s prophetic role in regards to the institute remains throughout his life and his prophetic grace even beyond. After the foundation is completed, the founder retains the responsibility to assure in collaboration with the members that the institute is faithful to its original inspiration. The Vatican II conciliar document on the renewal of religious life (read consecrated life) insists that the sources of renewal are those of the Christian life and the original inspiration of the institute (PC. 2) which is the founder’s gift to the institute. Fidelity to the original inspiration is not static. It requires discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to determine how the original inspiration of the founder as incorporated in the various elements of the institute can be kept fresh and meaningful here and now.

I think from his heavenly home the founder continues to keep a watchful eye and to give a helping hand to the institute in order that it remains faithful to God’s plan for it.

Anita Plourde
January 27, 2018
I was invited to come to the National Conference for Vicars for Religious in Chicago March 18-20, 2018, as a guest to represent the secular institutes. This 50th anniversary conference was under the theme *From Gratitude to Hope*. About 50 vicars participated, all but one were religious sisters. Fifty years ago at the founding of the conference all of the participants were members of the clergy. Over the years more women religious have been appointed as vicars or delegates, seemingly because most of the religious under their care are women religious.

Our keynote speakers were Sr. Mary Johnson, SNDdeN, sharing information on the recent study on international Sisters in the U.S.; Sr. Nancy Schreck, OSF, presenting the invitations before us in our ministries to consecrated life members; and Sr. Sharon Euart, RSM, leading us through the Resource Center for Religious Institutes “Tool Box” for assistance with communities in transition. Representatives from the National Religious Retirement Office, National Religious Vocation Conference, Religious Formation Conference and USCSI were present. Fr. Hank Limoncelli, OMI, presented on new developments from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome.

One of the presentations was on a Study of International Sisters in the United States, given by Sister Mary Johnson, SNDdeN from CARA. She is one of the sociologists that collected and interpreted the data about religious from countries other than the US. Participants in the study were from 83 countries and 6 continents. 47% entered the US before becoming religious and 48% entered religious life in their home country and then came to the US.

Sister Mary shared some of the suggestions the researchers are making in the forthcoming book to be published by Oxford University Press. First, we have a housing crisis for religious as parishes and dioceses are taking over convents to use for other purposes. Young people want community life but it is often difficult to find suitable housing for these young sisters. Intercommunity living is difficult as the different congregations have different theologies, spiritualities, concepts of authority and styles of communal life. In general, this does not work well.

There is a need for centers of enculturation which help the foreign born sisters adjust to a new country, differing Church structure, parish culture, and different ways of relating between men and women among other adjustments.

Immigration policies as well as financial support require legal advice and help. There is need for anti-racism training and measures to help alleviate loneliness and isolation. Communication between superiors of overseas communities and diocesan vicars for religious is key in making sure everyone has a common understanding of expectations.

Among statistics she offered was that there is a 50% retention rate in all women’s religious communities, regardless of whether they are affiliated with LCWR or CMSWR and that there are more men than women in religious formation in the United States at present.

She cautioned against using a “narrative of diminishment” because when you define a situation as real it becomes real in its consequences.

Sr. Stephanie Still, PBVM, executive director of the National Religious Retirement Office presented what services are available for religious congregations. I inquired about help for secular institutes but she said at this point, the grants will not apply to them. Their office could be a resource for networking of ideas.

Sr. Nancy Schreck’s presentation compared the status of religious institutes to being in exile. It is a time of night but will lead to new life. In the Hebrew belief midnight is when man was created, when Abraham sacrificed Isaac and when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. We also celebrate Christmas and Easter in the nighttime.
She maintains that the crisis in religious life is not in numbers but in their identity. They have withdrawn from the peripheries and gotten comfortable. Her overall assessment is that religious life as we have known it will die and something new, but as yet unforeseeable, will arise. In private discussions I had with the younger vicars, they were much more hopeful that religious life is not dying.

Fr. Hank Lemoncelli, OMI of the CICL/SAL explained how the dicastery works which I found very interesting. He gave the statistics and that there are 74 pontifical secular institutes with 2 for men, 9 clerical, 61 for women and 2 that include different branches. That was as of 2008, the most recent statistics he could find. There are two members of secular institutes working in the Congregation, one of whom heads the Office of Promotion and Formation which coordinates ad limina visits and workshops.

Fr. Hank, who is the only American in the dicastery, offered his personal e-mail hanklomi@gmail.com if we have any questions. We should just identify who we are. All official business is addressed to the Cardinal Prefect.

I found this encounter with the vicars to be very helpful insofar as a path to make our vocation as secular institutes more well known. Many were aware, some had questions, a few had no experience at all with us. Some knew their secular institute members in the diocese and invite them to events; others knew of some members that were not interested in sharing. A few questioned why the members of secular institutes living in their diocese do not have contact with the bishop.

All in all the vicars were very welcoming and hospitable. If we are invited again, I definitely would say this is a group that we should remain in contact with. - Marcia Vinje

On Thursday, December 7, 2017, I made an appearance in a grad. canon law course on consecrated life to present secular institutes and Caritas Christi in particular. There were five diocesan priests, one from Cameroon, English speaking, and two lay women. The priest from Cameroon was interested, particularly as I could speak of my experience visiting West African groups and giving a formation session there with Cordelia. I think it went well. There were many questions. I distributed the fridge USCSI magnet as well as the handout I had prepared for this last USCSI meeting and our little card. - Therese Druart

Margaret Laughlin from Madonna della Strada/Our Lady of the Way, died in Green Bay, WI, on December 28, 2017. Her brother-in-law phoned me and assured me a priest gave her the last rights. After offering condolences, I told him our institute would have a holy Mass offered for her. May she rest in peace. - Mary Ann Tady, Principal Officer
This year’s annual RECongress at Anaheim, California, took place from March 16-18, 2018. Here are echoes and pictures to share the event attended by over 35,000 persons from over 80 countries.

Amidst the chaos, LA traffic, and last minute change in plans, it was so wonderful to share our time with other secular institute members at the 2018 LA RECongress. This was my first Religious Education Congress, yet there was a sense of familiarity being with other devout Catholics, seeking to grow in their faith through liturgy, study and fellowship.

Through the generosity of the USCSI, I was able to attend several conferences. I chose to focus on those topics that would help us, as the leaven in the world, to sanctify the world from within by bringing people back to Christ. I attended “The art of accompaniment” by Bill Heubach, “Forming fruitful disciples” by Sherry Waddell, “Mary: Showing the way to missionary discipleship” by Dr. Leonard DeLarenzo, “Young People, the faith and vocational discernment” by Dr. Charlotte McCorquodale, and “Missionary disciples that fascinate, multiply and accompany” by Alejandro Aguileros-Titus.

The common theme amongst these talks was that missionary disciples should be experts at accompanying people on their spiritual journey. We meet people where they are at, whether they are pagans or priests. We take interest in their lives. We listen to them. When people perceive that we care for them, then they will be open to listening to us when we give witness to the love of Jesus. Pope Francis gave us the model of the Road to Emmaus story. Jesus took an interest in their discussion. He asked them to tell him their story. He listened. Then he shared his own witness. Because of this they invited him to stay with him. And we all know how the story ended. Jesus gave us, as members of secular institutes, a pattern to follow in our own lives.

The best part of the RECongress was having so much help at the USCSI booth! Jessica Swedzinski and I were so grateful for the local members of the Apostolic Oblates and Father Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata. With the extra help, and the language skills, we were able to converse with many passerbies, both in English and Spanish. It was encouraging that so many were receptive and interested in hearing about our vocation. There were several who even thought they may have a call to consecrated secularity.

This is, I feel, the best way to educate American Catholics about our vocation. So often we expect the message to come from the top down. But it is direct, person-to-person contact that is bearing fruit. Let us continue to take this grassroots movement approach, just as our Savior did. I hope you can join us on our next venture in Indianapolis for the college SEEK Conference, January 3-7, 2019.

-Kathy Tierney

Members from Schoenstatt Sisters, Fr Kolbe Missionaries, Apostolic Oblates, DesSales Institute & Volunteers with Don Bosco provided the workers for the USCSI booth at the Religious Education Congress. Wouldn’t you like to be with us next year? ...continue on next page
6th General Assembly of the Volunteers with Don Bosco

Meanwhile, our novitiate group and some high school volunteers spent Holy Week in Tijuana. Quite an enriching experience.

The bit of news from the Volunteers with Don Bosco (CDB) is that we had our 6th General Assembly in Italy from December 28, 2017 to January 5, 2018.

It dealt primarily with the topic of Living Communion in the Institute, discussing the challenges and possibilities of living an authentic and active bond of unity both with members living close enough to have regular meetings and with those who are geographically far from one another.

God bless,
Fr. John Puntino, April 3, 2018

A letter from the Papal Nuncio

Apostolic Nunciature
3339 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008-3610
United States of America

April 20, 2018

I am writing to thank you for your kind letter of April 20, 2018 regarding my recent visit to the Diocese of Lincoln and to be able to bless the new wing of St. Gregory the Great Seminary, as well as visit the Newman Center, the Cathedral of the Risen Christ, and to be able to visit with so many of the people, priests, and consecrated persons in the diocese.

I was very pleased to learn from your letter about the United States Conference of Secular Institutes and your important work. Secular institutes play a vital role in the Church today. Last year, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution Provida Mater Ecclesiae, Pope Francis said to members of secular institutes: “Your vocation and mission is to be attentive, on the one hand to the realities that surround you, always asking, ‘What is happening?’; without stopping at what appears on the surface but going deeper, and, at the same time, is to be attentive to the mystery of God, to recognize where He is manifest. Attentive to the world, with your heart immersed in God.” (Pope Francis, Message to the Italian Conference of Secular Institutes, 28 October 2017)

Grateful for the witness to Christ in the world by members of secular institutes, I commend you and all those belonging to the United States Conference of Secular Institutes to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was always attentive to the things of God.

With cordial regards and prayerful best wishes, I am
Sincerely yours in Christ,
+ Archbishop Christophe Pierre
Apostolic Nuncio
George Cardinal Alencherry  
Major Archbishop  
Syro-Malabar Church

Prot. No. 0179/2018  
31 January 2018

Message

I am delighted to know that Thresiamma Mathew Pazhukunnel belonging to the Secular Institute of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (OMMI) is celebrating the Golden Jubilee of her religious commitment. She as the member of this Institute was faithful to live out her consecrated life in carrying out her mission inspired by the charism of OMMI ‘a constant availability to the will of the Father to live everywhere the charity of Christ through service, with the help of Mary’. From 1975 onwards, Thresiamma is known to me and in the life and activities of this Secular Institute, I was closely associated with. Therefore, whatever I write here below is from my personal knowledge.

Thresiamma by her inner aspiration and the formation in the Secular consecration and spirituality followed her Lord’s own mission with the motto “fullness of life to all”. It paved way for the empowerment of women’s skills and employment all over the world. She began her voyage of women empowerment as the manager of COPTAC, a social concern of women’s training and employment under the Archeparchy of Changanacherry, Co-ordinator of the Malanadu Development Society, Health Educational Officer, Regional Director and finally as Director of Gender and Development. The field of action of her apostolate is the human being in its entirety, both within the Christian community and in the civil community, where relationships are formed in the search for the common good. I am happy to acknowledge the honors offered to her from The Women’s Summit Foundation of Geneva, Outstanding Women Entrepreneur Award from Federation of Indian Women, New Delhi, Outstanding Woman Award from Jaycees India, Global Achievers Award from Global Foundation, Women Empowerment Award by CHASS, Changanacherry and Super Woman Achiever Award from Femina International.

She has succeeded to respond to the special call and mission to become witness of Christian life in temporal realities and to penetrate the world with the power of the Gospel in the manner of leaven and to live a consecrated life according to the evangelical counsels and to be a responsible Christian presence in the world, from within, in order to shape it, perfect it and sanctify it.

It was in 1967 that the Indian Province of OMMI was established. I am glad to acknowledge that Archana Women’s Center in Kottayam, founded by Thresiamma, is a social concern of OMMI in India, leading the most poor and marginalised women to non-traditional livelihood skills. It is to be appreciated that thousands of women have acquired highly remunerative skills through this center. I wish and pray, on this occasion of the Golden Jubilee, that she be strengthened to make a “Difference” with your life and involvements in the Church and society. May God bless you and all your endeavours!

George Cardinal Alencherry  
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church
The international Schoenstatt Family, which includes 5 secular institutes and a large lay movement, is celebrating a Kentenich Year to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of their founder, Father Joseph Kentenich, on September 15, 1968. The Schoenstatt communities want to share the charism of their founder with ever wider circles, believing that the founder has a mission for the Church and world.

When the Institute of the Schoenstatt Fathers met with Pope Francis on 3 September 2015 he said to them:

“You’re aware that a charism is not a museum artifact that remains preserved in a glass case to be looked at and nothing more. Faithfulness or keeping it pure does not at all mean that we seal it in a bottle like distilled water so that it cannot be contaminated by the outside air. A charism will not be preserved this way. It must go out and come in contact with reality, with people and their problems and concerns. Thus in this fruitful encounter with reality the charism has a chance to grow and renew itself. Reality is also transformed or changed through the spiritual power that this charism brings with it.”

Around the world September 15, 2018 will be marked with festivities to honor the founder and proclaim his charism.

Prayer for the Kentenich Year

God our Father, In Father Kentenich you have given us a father and a prophet, a witness and a herald of your message for our time, enkindled by the Holy Spirit.

Give us of his fire. Give us of his founder spirit. Let his charism be so alive in us that we can shape the future of the Church and society. May his vision be our vision: In the power of the covenant of love, a new world is to arise – a world in which people form a covenant culture wherever they live and work.

Father in heaven, we ask you: Accept Father Kentenich into the company of the saints recognized by the Church. Open the door to him and his mission everywhere so that he can guide many people on the way to the fullness of life, the way to you. We ask this of you, in communion with Mary, our Mother Thrice Admirable, Queen, and Victress of Schoenstatt, through Christ our Lord. Amen.
Your executive committee is working with designers to fashion a new magnet and a tri-fold with current vocation personnel from our 16 conference members.

Remember to keep the women of Regnum Christi in prayer as they discern their future path via a General Assembly this past April followed with discussions for the over 500 members internationally.

The Apostolic Sodales are exclusively founded for diocesan priests. Rev Frank Jindra is their international secretary general working with the five priests in the Omaha area. If you think this might be something your pastor is looking toward, do contact him at: 402-564-7151.

Dr. Prachi Shah from Michigan has written the “spiritual constitutions” for a Cistercian Secular Institute; she has met with the Procurator Generalis of the Cistercian (Trappist) Order in Rome at the end of May; and also conferred with a canon lawyer (our past speaker – Sr Sharon Holland). At present she is beginning to write the juridical statutes for a private association of the faithful at the request of her bishop and will disseminate the spiritual constitutions more broadly to other abbots/abbesses of the Order. She certainly appreciates our prayers as she goes forward in the Holy Spirit.

Did you receive your emailed Invitation to our National Meeting? Come and bring your spiritual friends to the Franciscan Center of Renewal at Scottsdale, Arizona, for a fabulous last weekend in September. Our theme is: Accepting Acceptance - Being in the Present Moment

In the next couple of days a flyer to share our September 29 Retreat Day will be in your email box. We are thrilled to have Father Ralph O’Donnell, Secretary for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, as our main speaker.

Principal Officer Sue Larkin is supporting the USCSI National Meeting by calling her Council Meeting of the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ together after the annual USCSI meeting. So three additional members plan to join the four members attending the full weekend, all staying through Monday, October 1st at Scottsdale, AZ.

What are you doing to promote vocations for secular institutes and in particular for your institute? Please prayerfully consider coming to the Seek Conference in January 3-7, 2019 at Indianapolis.

If you ever have extra minutes, check out the link for the World Conference of Secular Institutes (CMIS) at www.cmis-int.org/en/ They were approved by the Vatican on May 23, 1974.

USCSI Mission Statement

The USCSI shares in the mission of Jesus Christ in serving its member institutes by providing education, resources, and support for member institutes.

The USCSI is an organization of member institutes committed to making known, understood, and appreciated the call to consecrated secularity in the Catholic Church.

USCSI collaborates with other groups to present consecrated secularity as a viable option in today’s Church.

Executive Committee of the US Conference of Secular Institutes

President: Marcia Vinje Crete, NE marcia.schoenstatt@yahoo.com

Vice-Pres: Fr George Hazler Troy, MI gfh141@gmail.com

Secretary: Jessica Swedzinski Sleepy Eye, MN jessica@schsrsmary.org

Treasurer: Evelyn Loyola Merced, CA neneloy@aol.com

Councillor: Claudette Cyr Watertown, CT cfcyr@yahoo.com

www.secularinstitutes.org