From the President:

Dear Friends,

Lent is a season that calls us to deeper love. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are practices which the Church offers to us as a stimulus to put things back in order; that is, to place God, who is Love, in the center of our lives once again.

We are reminded to follow Jesus’ example of putting his relationship with his father first and foremost in his life. He would leave his disciples and friends to go off by himself to pray in order to deepen his contact with the one who sent him on his mission. Even the Christ found that he needed time alone to listen to his father and that meant to put aside distractions and focus on his one true need, union with his father and his will. Can we do less?

Let us then unite ourselves with Jesus in his walk to Calvary. It was a way of triumph in many ways, but victories unseen. There was the Transfiguration, but he cautioned the apostles to keep it a secret. They should learn to see his divinity in the midst of everyday life, when he appeared to be the same as others. Couldn’t our Lent also be a time to search for the workings of the divine in the ordinary doings of our daily life? We profess to believe that God is everywhere, but even we, consecrated to the Lord, need to work hard to be aware of his presence and his action on a daily basis. Those inspirations, those near misses on the highway, those smiles and comforting conversations, are the ways in which our father reaches out to us and tells us as he told Jesus, “You are my beloved.”

And the Father shows us his love by conforming us to his Son, on the cross. May we embrace our crosses with the same love and joy as Jesus did, with a divine smile even as we cry out in our humanity. The blending of the two, divine and human, is what Lent is about.

Wishing you much grace in this holy season, Marcia Vinje
Our national conference of secular institutes is invited annually to the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore for the Consulting Organizations Meeting of and for the Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations (CCLV). Twenty-seven representatives (two absentees, eight being women) met from 8:00 to 11:00 am on Saturday, November 9, 2019, under the theme of Hope in the Midst of Challenge. After a working breakfast of introductions, we divided into four small groups of Clergy, Consecrated Life, Vocations, and Seminary Formation for the first hour of discussions and then came together. This is the 3rd and final year of Cardinal Joseph Tobin’s leadership.

We were instructed to return any paper(s) where we wrote any handwritten note(s), unless we understood not to leave anything from this conference in waste baskets at the Marriott.

Here are a few insights from our four groups and the plenary session. I want to say this was a watershed moment in that we felt hopeful we left with a working agenda toward positive developments.

Consecrated Life shared community hopes and crystallized on a hope we could gather as consecrated life members across the USA for a conference?! In May, the CMSWR and LCWR co-sponsored a workshop on Canon Law for 100 members which was “only positive in every evaluation!”

Cardinal Tobin shared his observance of proceeding from the servant/maintenance leadership to an anticipatory eye to the future, echoing St John Paul II’s concluding idea from Vita Consecrata to not only concentrate on the glorious past, but go further with gusto into the path of hope. Indeed, we have worldwide vocations, searchers networks, and much collaboration done. The Archdiocese of Newark held a pilgrimage of 84 buses to the National Cathedral in DC where they ran out of chairs for the 4,000+. (It was a day event with 70 priests, 10% of his archdiocese, offering Confessions, Mass with Sermon, meal, and tour.) Resources need to be given on to learn contemplative listening with communal discernment – as much is heard about women’s leadership being silos and unwilling to benefit from hearing directly from the grunt people.

Bishop Thomas Daly, Spokane WA, spoke for Vocations: They discussed recalling one’s 1st call to vocation, to return to that anticipated joy and beauty of the initial call; to share and reflect on it, never losing sight of it! Interestingly, he spoke of Germany being thirty years behind our American tools of holiness in that our priests are picking up the practice of thanksgiving prayers after offering Mass, leading all possible to the Sacraments, seeing vocation as their one source of Hope for America’s future, etc. Serra Magazine has the same issues today as 60 years ago, noting the call to serve Jesus Christ is timeless. Jesus asked: what do you have? and fed thousands from the boy’s fish and loaves.

Seminary Formation reported on their pre-ordination retreats and increased collaboration between conferences in their field. The psychology interviews and review for religious as well as the bubbling hope that the life of seminarians today is filled with a desire to serve and a desire to want more from this temporal time.

Clergy reported a focus on ministry and fraternity. Spoken by Fr Dan Hanley (the incoming associate director for CCLV), there is a branching out to permanent deacons and their needs. Over and over they hear the call for networking and organizing the strength of priests, as isolation and “the silo effect” need to be combated. The priests want to find encounter spaces to renew and refresh their vocation and effectiveness.
Our plenary session was dominated by the rich insights of Bishop Earl Boyea from Diocese of Lansing, MI (as he has been a member since 2000 and expects he’ll be serving until his retirement countdown in seven years).

1) What would draw our groups together? As annual reports to common goals are duly given, I hear the cry for more than once a year meeting to harness the dynamic among us. Can’t we find what would energize us – not polarize us. Immediately, delegates wanted a deeper level of conversation as the watershed continued. The CCLV executive secretary, Casey Brusnahan, spoke of being invigorated by the joy of seeing us coming together and working together in our Consecrated Life small group. The idea was to have CCLV sponsor a gathering every third year to a conference for unity (modeled on a smaller scale like the Convocation of Catholic Leaders in Orlando, FL). Theme could be taken from Pope Benedict’s highlighting: Go back to Nazareth. It is the genesis of the Catholic Church to go back to the beginning every Advent; we could return to the first love of our chosen vocations.

2) Bishop Boyea brought up the elephant in the room: parents worried about their sons’ safety in college seminaries. Rosemary Sullivan called it a sound bite as U.S. seminaries are closed to parents dropping in. These remarks led right into Bishop Boyea’s ideas for the Theme for 2020 to continue interaction with the Laity and with all forms of formation and mission for our 15 national conferences joined at the table.

Once again the elephant in the room was addressed by the incoming Chair of CCLV, Bishop James F. Checchio, Diocese of Metuchen, NJ, when he asked in tandem with the LCWR president if it couldn’t be a theme two years out so it’s a driving rather than a cosmetic or shoehorn theme. Practicing our contemplative listening skills to better respond than to react, we learned that LCWR has a 2015-2022 theme in place; NOCERCC has a five-year plan with ongoing formation theme (“2020 Vision” which will follow through with years on spirituality, formation, ministry, etc); NCVR has a theme Prophetic of the Future Not our Own; NCDVD’s Mrs Rosemary Sullivan said they haven’t had a theme in her last 17 years other than: Do what Jesus says; the Deacons want to highlight collaboration as the important word heard this morning, and so on.

So after a brief conversation by the five heading the meeting, Cardinal Tobin thanked Bishop Boyea for his last comment that each delegate should email their coming year(s) themes to Fr Luke Ballman so he can put the theme together for our November 14, 2020 meeting. Thus ended our fruitful morning; as the CCLV Bishops Committee meets for dinner and annual afternoon session.

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go further, go together. So our Consecrated Life group which contains the two religious sisters’ conferences, the Vicars for Consecrated Life, the Consecrated Virgins, and the US Conference of Secular Institutes, will institute a zoom call at the end of January 2020 to continue working together and harnessing the dynamic energy within our groups. [This may coincide with our EC Meeting in Mundelein.]

Three last trivia points are:
- The Archdiocese of Newark celebrates Sunday Masses in no less than 26 languages.
- When Catholic Charities called the LCWR for help at our Mexico border, Sr Carol Zinn, SSJ, put out the email and over 1,600 sisters volunteered to go to the border with their services, plus $1.5M+ was raised for those in need.
- When I sat down for the Opening Mass, I found myself next to Brother Patrick Moffett from CMSM who was the missing place next to me at CCLV on Saturday (as he didn’t get the invitation due to change in their leadership having some called to Rome), so I could help along in this regard for next year’s meeting.
Centennial Celebration of SIM in Assisi

Cardinal Joao Braz de Ariz saying Mass at the 100th Anniversary of SIM at the chapel of San Damiano in Assisi where the first 12 Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ made their vows in 1919. He is the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Sue Larkin, principal officer of the Missionaries in the USA, speaks with him outside the church before holy Mass.

Heartfelt Congratulations on a Century of Service to the Church!

CMIS Presidency met with Pope Francis

November 28, 2019, will remain a memorable date for secular institutes around the world! At 9:30 a.m. the Presidency of CMIS (Jolanta, Elba and Margherita), with Pierre, its Secretary, and Chiara, the person in charge of the activities of the Secretariat, met Pope Francis in his private library. After a clear presentation of the Institutes in the various countries to which the Pope showed great interest, we carefully described the Congress of Avila and the World Assembly in August 2020. He stopped to discuss with us the most urgent problems of today’s world (women, violence, etc.) and stressed how important discernment is. When asked by us about our desire and need for a theology proper to secular institutes, he advised us, after serious reflection, to work together with a theologian from the Gregorian of Rome whom he had the opportunity to meet personally. With the final blessing he assured us of his continuous prayer for us and also asked for ours. He promised a video message for the next Congress.

Photo from www.vatican.va/news_services
USCSI at NCYC 2019

The USCSI made its biannual appearance at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), held in Indianapolis this past November 21-23, 2019. The conference drew 20,000 youths from Anchorage to Miami for an adventure in faith through games, music, lectures, and the sacraments. Jessica Swedzinski, Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, and Kathy Tierney, DeSales Secular Institute, represented secular institutes at their booth in the expo hall and educated youth and some of the thousands of chaperones, parents, teachers, religious and clergy who stopped by the booth.

The booth sported its new banner and eye-catching “cubes” which represented each of the secular institutes and some of their members. A quiz about secular institutes, USCSI magnets and, of course, chocolate candy were effective in drawing people in for discussion. Responses ranged from “never heard of it” to “I think I might be called to this vocation. Can I have some material?”

These days people are reluctant to pick up printed materials, although we did distribute about 1200 magnets and 100 brochures. However, being able to educate Catholics who are discerning or encouraging vocations is invaluable in making our vocation known. We hope you can join us in Indianapolis for NCYC 2021!

VOCATION STAR at NCYC 2019: “The Cooking Priest”
Voluntas Dei Secular Institute
Father Leo Patalinghug

Let’s go next to hear what was published in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis website about a fellow secular institute member. Please see https://www.archindy.org/criterion/local/2019/11-29/s-cooking.html

We at USCSI give credit to: John Shaghnessy, who titled his special report: Cooking priest shares special recipe for teenagers to get to heaven. Known as “The cooking priest,” Voluntas Dei Father Leo Patalinghug has a reputation for creating meals that have been described as heavenly. During the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 22, he provided a different kind of recipe—“Five Steps to Become a Teenage Saint”—to help youths get to heaven.

Yet before he offered those steps during one of the many workshop sessions at the conference, Father Leo stressed two points. The first point he shared was, “Being a saint is our calling in life.” His second point began with a question for the youths: “Do you want to get to heaven? Then you’d better be a saint.” He then stressed that everyone can become a saint if they follow these five steps:

1-Reach out to God. “The first step in becoming a saint is realizing that you are not a saint and you need help. How are you going to be a saint if you’re not trying to reach out to God? Try! Maybe you can try by reaching out to a sinner or someone who is poor. Or how about this—reach out and call up your priest and say, ‘You know what, I’m struggling. Help me.’ Reach out.”

2-Call out for God: “You got to say, ‘God save me.’ God is going to give you the greatest gift you can ever imagine—the gift of himself. At Christmas, God comes out of heaven and into this ugly, messy world for everyone.”

3-Be sanctified: “Let God come into your life and cut sin away. You do not have that power, but God does. We have a sacrament to help us to
become saints. You want to find saints? Look for them in the confessional. For it is there that they tell the truth, and the truth sets them free.”

4-Be bound to God: “God can interpret the groans of our hearts. God understands us. God can give life to us all.”

5-Be a bridge to God for others: Become “a bridge, not a barrier” for other people in their relationships with God.

Summing up, Father Leo said, “That’s what you can do. It’s that easy, but also that difficult. Let’s be honest. It’s not as easy as saying, ‘God save me,’ nor does it comes so quickly. It requires us to be willing to practice our faith and to be faithful in practicing our faith. It requires us to be consistent and to make sure you surround yourself with all of the right people. It’s a total stretching.”

Andrea Fisher brings youth from Polk County, Iowa.

Staying right at the Archdiocese of Indianapolis website and giving them all due credit, continue reading just two of the many NCYC 2019 impacts from the article by Mike Krokos:

Karle Kramer arrived at NCYC not sure what was in store for her. She left with a sense of how to better live out her faith. “I think this is the best weekend of my life,” said the sophomore from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa. “I’ve met so many people, and I’ve gone to so many sessions about forgiveness. It really changed my perspective on forgiving people, not holding things in my heart, but opening myself up to others’ perspective.”
Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, from Washington, DC, stopped by USCSI booth.

Area code 406 and a Bible Verse: Caden Sova and Reece Donahue literally “flipped out” at this year’sNCYC. The high school seniors from the Diocese of Helena, Montana, attended the youth gathering in 2017, but this year decided that their time in the air would literally continue inside the thematic village at the youth gathering. They both sported signs around their neck that read: “Wanna see a flip?” If a passerby said “yes,” they would do a back flip for them.

But there was also a catch: They asked each person to stop what they were doing and set their alarms to pray at 4:06 p.m. later that day. “406 is the area code for the entire state of Montana,” Caden and Reece explained, “and there’s a Bible verse [Phil 4:6] about praying and giving thanks at all times. Hopefully, we’re going to have phone alarms going off all over Indianapolis.”

Both teenagers were moved during adoration, seeing everyone go down to the floor on their knees in worship. Reece admitted he was looking forward to the closing Mass on Nov. 23 as well. “It’s just so beautiful seeing 20,000-plus youths going down and receiving the Eucharist all at one time. It’s the best!” he said. †

Let’s figure out this secular institute quiz together! ☺ Pray we are connecting with future vocations 😊

Dear Jesus, lead me to that place where you can love me most, show me my life’s mission for you. Amen.
USCSI crew keeps up with the college kids at SLS20!

The Student Leadership Summit hosted by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) during the week of the New Year was once again a marathon promotion event for the USCSI expo staff. Jessica Swedzinski (Schoenstatt Sisters), Kathy Tierney (DeSales Secular Institute), Donna Kurgan (Caritas Christi), Joan Patton and Christine French (Apostolic Oblates) kept the USCSI booth alive with smiles and energy for the 9:00 am to midnight expo at the Phoenix Convention Center.

The event was attended by over 9,000 participants made up of college students, campus ministers, lay ministers, as well as local Catholics. It was an awesome sight to see over 250 priests and 28 bishops process into daily mass during the five-day event. It was even more awesome to speak to so many young Catholics on fire for their faith and for vocations! While most have never heard of secular institutes when they first visited our booth, they were eager to learn more and some even asked for information to take back to their campuses and parishes.

While it is a labor of love, working the booth has its rewards. I enjoyed giving our quiz (bait for getting attention) to Bishop Olmstead, who enjoyed the quirky answers! Again there were participants who exclaimed delight over our magnets – over the years – as they proved the theology of the frig in offering repeated impressions to give Jesus a chance with their life plans...

We are ever thankful to Phoenix local, Donna Kurgan, for being our cab driver and furniture store. The carpeting and the cushioned chairs she furnished were most appreciated! Donna got right into it, and was a true spark plug. When she gave her name and asked what school and major they were interested in, suddenly the college students stood there and engaged about secular institutes. Mostly we thank the USCSI Executive Committee for supporting the Vocations Committee in promoting our vocation at these Expos.

-Kathy Tierney

Every minute seems to be filled during these days. We can truly give on our vocation in so many ways. I feel a very firm, good groundwork has been laid. Despite the vastness of our American nation, it is fulfilling to realize how many people have been touched by our work of reaching out via website, brochures, magnets, booths at expos, and vocation fairs and panels... We reach into the core of those
willing to promote our secular institute vocation; these are namely, the parents, vocation committee grunt members, chaperones, the young parish priests, the campus ministry personnel, the entire secretarial arm of diocesan and archdiocesan offices, as well as the USCCB many-faceted staff members, and the bishops and archbishops. It is very rewarding as we can offer the fullness of our US conference members. Any business today recognizes the power of networking and this is where the young church is at.

–Jessica Swedzinski

Christine French added: “I don’t know how to pick a favorite moment. The reality that this experience was merely a foretaste of heaven was my favorite aspect of SLS20. It was an experience of the communion of the (future) saints where I ran into people I’ve interacted with in many ways over the years. Two years ago I attended this conference with people from the Archdiocese of Omaha and spent a lot of time with two other campus ministers. At the time none of us knew our vocations and now we met up while two of us were working booths next to each other (he was with the Salesian brothers) and the third came as a seminarian for our Archdiocese.”

“I am grateful to work side by side with other members of secular institutes. Hearing others’ stories and examples helps me deepen my own understanding of our vocation. I also enjoyed watching people understand about secular institutes as we explained the different forms of consecrated life and the image of bread and tortillas really helped!

My favorite moment was having conversations with people who came to our table. I not only had an opportunity to share about secular institutes, I also had the opportunity to listen to people’s search for a deeper encounter with Jesus. I shared with one woman who was struggling in her marriage and saw her receive a deeper invitation to pray with her husband. Witnessing people encounter Jesus and the truth He offers, sometimes through us, made me grateful to be leaven in the world.”

Peace, Joan Patten
SLS20 Photo Album — Please consider coming to join us in St Louis Seek 2021

Kathy as Vocation Chair opened the doors to FOCUS

Quiet moments needed in the busy college scene life

Mini rest time with Shroud Presenter, Jim Bertrand

Christine works the book signing line with leaven quiz

Donna was the local Phoenix hostess par excellence

Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted complimented our staff
SAVE-THE-DATE! Mark your calendars for our National Meeting which will be from September 18-20, 2020, at the San Damiano Retreat Center in Danville, CA. There will be more unveiling of our theme and presenters in our next Mountaineer. In looking for flights it may be more economical to fly into San Francisco (than Oakland, which is closer) and take an Uber – about 40-45 minutes drive.

Please keep Mary Powers, Servite Secular Institute, in your prayers. We heard from her principal officer, Alexis Pottinger, that she is now very frail and suffering from dementia. Last year she moved into residential care. The good news is that there are now two women in formation in Ottawa and Texas! Alexis ended her email saying: “In May last year, I met two of your conference members in Rome, ladies from Jamaica. It was a joy to encounter their deep spirituality and their courage and commitment at their age in travelling to Rome for a short meeting. We all benefited from their wisdom and experience.”

Remember in your prayers Reine-Aimée Welsh, a major founding member of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, who passed on December 6, 2019, at 91 years of age. Entering the North America West Region (Montreal) on July 2, 1952; she was immediately entrusted with the formation of the new members, first in Grand Falls, New Brunswick, then, in March 1953, at Cap de la Madeleine. There she directed the largest training house of the Institute which, at times, counted up to 80 persons. Many fond memories of her inspiration abound.

From 1952 to 1958, she was a member of the General Council of the Institute and was subsequently elected Directress General from December 1958 to 1968. In 1968-1969, she studied psychology in Help Relationship in Paris, France. Back to Canada she was manager of the Bookstore Notre-Dame in St. Jérôme from 1969 to 1974; then at customer service (1974-1975) at the Library Garneau in Quebec city. Afterwards, from 1975 to 1988, she worked as an intermediary Chief at the Ministry of Social Affairs in Quebec (M.A.S.) R.I.P.

Calling on a deed of service from our Spanish speaking members: We are repeatedly asked for secular institute materials in Spanish. Would someone be willing to translate a couple of our basic brochures? Or if there are friends who you could direct our way – this would be a great way to further our vocation. Please email Jessica or text: 262-244-9329.

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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.