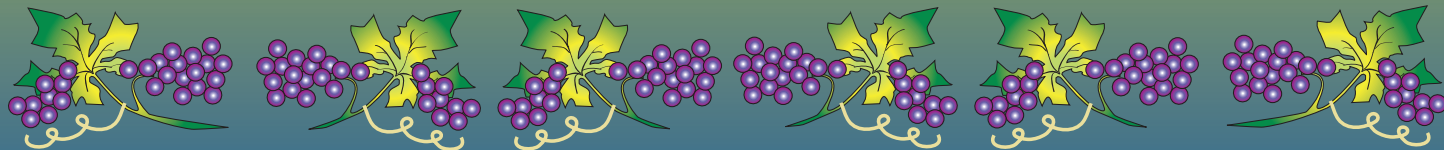


CONSECRATA

A newsletter for member communities, friends and supporters of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious



VOL. 9 NO. 1 SPRING 2016

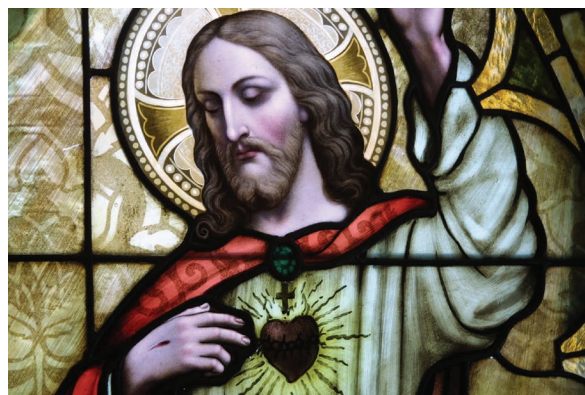
THE CHARISM OF MERCY AND THE YEAR OF MERCY

By Sister Joseph Marie Ruessmann, RSM

Saint Thomas Aquinas describes “mercy” as compassionate or heartfelt sorrow at another’s unhappiness, distress, or misfortune, together with a will to alleviate it. One is affected with sorrow at the misery of another as though it were one’s own, and, consequently, impelled to succor him if possible (see I, Q21, A 1,3,4; II-II, Q30, A1-4). Mercy strives to alleviate or to relieve the other person’s condition of need or suffering.

Religious institutes, in a spirit of service to those in need, convey the mercy of God to others by carrying out the works of mercy even if their focus is not on mercy, but on charity, hospitality, teaching, or other charisms. More than in external works, though, the mission of religious “consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness ... The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all” (*Vita Consecrata* 72).

The Religious Sisters of Mercy’s fourth vow of service to the poor, sick, and ignorant, which terms include not only the material or physical aspects, but also the psychological and spiritual, is a way to express the charism of mercy. The



“Where the misery of mankind meets the Mercy of God.”

sisters become mediators of God’s mercy by taking on the attitude of Christ, conveying to those in need the merciful redeeming love of the Father, who loves all men with an infinite, tender compassion.

The Religious Sisters of Mercy serve the poor, sick, and ignorant not only through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, but also by applying effective methods to improve their condition based on developed methods of medical care, methods of education, etc. For this reason, higher education, in the form of advanced degrees, is important for the sisters, as a way to be of more effective service to remove the causes of misery or the conditions of need.

The charism or mission of mercy is of heightened importance in this Year of Mercy, in order to attract others to God’s mercy. Jesus told Saint Faustina, “Speak to the world about My mercy ... It is a sign for the end times. After it will come the day of justice. While there is still time, let them have recourse to the fountain of My mercy” (Diary 848).

CMSWR Board members participated in a workshop in the Vatican for the close of the Year of Consecrated Life.



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, SV

+

Dear Friends,

As the Year of Consecrated Life came to a close on the Feast of the Presentation, February 2, 2016, many Board members of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR) gathered together with nearly 5,000 other consecrated women and men from around the globe at the heart of the Church to celebrate with our Holy Father the special blessings of the call to total consecration. In his Mass homily concluding the year, Pope Francis called “consecrated persons ...to be a concrete and prophetic sign of the nearness of God.” And in a special way he exhorted us to be the “guardians of awe,” encouraging us to live always in the awe of that first encounter with Christ and in gratitude for the gift of our vocation.

This Year of Consecrated Life has kept the beauty of the call to religious consecration before each of us. Thank you, Pope Francis!

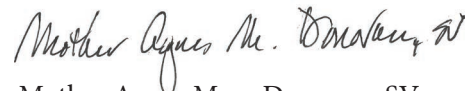
In this edition of *Consecrata* we reflect upon the many grace-filled moments of celebration enjoyed by so many of the Sisters of our member communities: the Holy Father’s visit to our nation; the National Assembly and Symposium on Religious Life held in St. Louis in November; the fruits of the release of a new film — *For Love Alone* — which gives

image to the beauty of the call to religious consecration; and we now anticipate our closing event: the upcoming GIVEN Forum for 300 Catholic young women leaders, to be held this June at the Catholic University of America.

The “river” of this Year of Consecrated Life, lived so beautifully and “enthusiastically” by the member communities of the CMSWR, now meets “the ocean of mercy” — as Pope Francis put it. Let us all live deeply our Christian vocation, steeped in the mysterious, gratuitous love of our Lord, full of awe at the gift of faith we have received and full of zeal to share the beauty of an encounter with Jesus Christ with those entrusted to our care and prayers.

Be assured that we are praying for you in this extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

In Christ, our Life,



Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, SV
Chairperson of CMSWR



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BOUNTY OF THE HARVEST: CMSWR 2015 Membership Survey Findings

In the flurry of activity surrounding the events of the Year of Consecrated Life, the demonstration of enthusiasm from CMSWR's major superiors and sisters bore witness to the vitality of religious communities who are ready to "awaken the world" and bear the love of Christ to every man and woman.

Data from the CMSWR annual surveys of the communities whose major superiors (or those analogous to a major superior) are members (or associate members) of CMSWR demonstrate how far and wide the reach of these sisters and their witness extends. The most recent survey in 2015, completed by 106 of the 120 communities whose major superior belongs to CMSWR, indicate that the sisters are engaged in a wide range of apostolates that span every field and ministry. Over 80% of the professed sisters of CMSWR communities nationwide are engaged in active ministry. Among those who are engaged in outreach, the most prevalent areas are education (19%), health care (17%), and evangelization, catechesis, and religious education (11%). The percentage of Sisters who are engaged in these areas is likely considerably higher since the survey asked that each sister be counted only once, using the category that best describes her primary ministry. Sisters in these communities can be found across the United States from coast to coast. They currently serve or live in 137 dioceses in the nation.

Survey findings over the four years from 2012-2015 indicate that the sisters are relatively young. The average ages of postulants, novices, and temporary professed sisters is 27, 29, and 32 years old, respectively. Overall, the average age of the CMSWR members' sisters is 57 years old. This is well below the overall average age of women religious nationwide. The number of sisters currently in initial formation is approaching 1,000, with sisters in temporary vows as the largest group followed by novices and postulants. It is interesting to note that the 2015 survey shows that the distribution of sisters in communities among the membership is relatively even across age categories from the 30s through the 80s: 16% of the sisters are in their 30s; 14% are in their 40s, 13% are in their 50s, 15% are in their 60s, 15% are in their 70s, and 12% are in their 80s. Somewhat smaller percentages are younger than 30 years old (9%) or age 90 or older (6%).

The Holy Spirit moves continuously in the Church to respond to the needs of the current age. In religious life, this sometimes may be expressed in new foundations and charisms. Less than one-third of the communities whose major superiors are part of CMSWR were founded in the last 50 years (1966 or later). Many other communities are well established, dating back to their foundation in America or overseas in the 1800s or earlier. Mother Agnes, SV, Chairperson of the CMSWR and Superior General of the

Sisters of Life explains, "The presence of the well-established communities lends a wisdom and guiding presence to the newer communities. I am sure that without the mentoring support and generosity of these superiors, communities such as ours would never have come to fruition. It is a great blessing of the CMSWR to have the older and the younger institutes represented among our membership."

Although the Year of Consecrated Life has come to a close, we pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire and act through women religious who are afire with His love. May this flame continue to spread throughout religious institutes and into the world around us.



For Love Alone is available for purchase through Amazon, Google Play and iTunes. For more information about upcoming screenings or to set up a vocation event featuring the film, contact us at forlovealone@cmswr.org

WAKING UP THE WORLD: THE PROPHET

In the midst of the many sports fans flocking to St. Louis November 13-14, the city witnessed scores of women wearing something other than the memorabilia of their favorite team. Over 400 people, mostly women religious, participated in the first CMSWR Symposium, "To Wake Up the World." Participants from 61 different communities listened to several keynote presentations and breakout sessions, joined in liturgies and a holy hour, and enjoyed meeting old and new friends.



PHETIC WITNESS OF CONSECRATED LIFE



Liturgies took place at the Basilica of St. Louis, the "Old Cathedral."



The choir practices for liturgies.



Special thanks to the staff of the Drury Plaza Hotel at the Arch, who graciously accommodated CMSWR throughout the weekend!



National Assembly and Formation Workshop



CMSWR Members at the National Assembly in the Basilica of St. Louis

On the heels of the Year of Consecrated Life and even before it ends we have yet more: the Year of Mercy. What Providence, and what intentionality on the part of the Lord, for religious are the face of the Church, the Bride of Christ, and, as such, are always called to be the face of mercy.

Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, SV - Presidential Address

Prior to the Symposium, the CMSWR National Assembly took place. Participating in this event were primarily major superiors from member communities. More than 100 sisters took part in conferences, liturgies, and the election of board members.

In his homily at this event, Cardinal Rigali said, “This National Assembly, which you are observing, is a day of special memory, enveloped in thanksgiving – Eucharistic thanksgiving, for all the blessings that have been bestowed on the Church during these past years since CMSWR was canonically approved by the Holy See. Yes, this present National Assembly of CMSWR invites you, dear sisters, to remember your origins, to reflect on those great ideals that inspired your founding board members, and to praise God for the blessing of approval given to you by the Church.”

After the Symposium, many sisters remained in St. Louis to participate in the Formation Workshop on Sunday, November 15. Over 250 sisters from 61 communities met to discuss their formation programs in light of the Year of Consecrated Life and the upcoming Year of Mercy. Some sisters shared about the international event for formators held in the Vatican in April 2015. In a talk titled, “Forming Hearts to Christ as a Daughter of the Church,” Sister Agnes Holtz, CFR, shared, “What a gift it is to remember the mercy and love of God that has changed our lives forever.”



CMSWR Board Members: Top Row: Sister Miriam Seiferman, FSE, Sister Clare Matthaiss, CFR, Mother Joan Paul Tobin, CK, Sister Anne Theresa Walsh, ASCJ, Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, SV, Sister Mary Angela Highfield, OP, Mother Mary Clare Roufs ACJ, Mother Carole Marie Troskowski, PVMI, Mother Maria Regina Pacis Caceres, SSVM, Bottom Row: Sister M. Angela Mellady, OSF, Mother Mary of the Sacred Heart Gaes, SSVM, Sister Christine Born, OP, Mother Judith Zuniga, OCD, Sister Cecilia Ann Rezac, MS, Mother Jane Mary Firestone, RSM



Sisters discuss how to bring the fruits of the Symposium into their formation programs.

WELCOME HOME

By Sister Marie Bernadette Thompson, OP

There is something captivating about the two fountains in the piazza at St. Peter's Basilica. A seemingly endless cascade of life bubbling over, they seem to say, "Recall the fountain of Life, the waters of Baptism. Come, be restored in His mercy; it endures forever."

In January the CMSWR Board of Directors went on pilgrimage to Rome to be present at the closing events for the Year of Consecrated Life – workshops culminating with a papal audience and Holy Mass on the Feast of the Presentation.

As a small contingent of 13 amid a handful of other Americans, we joined with thousands of consecrated persons from across the continents: men and women, active and cloistered, consecrated virgins, religious, and others. Coming to the center of our faith, we were welcomed, celebrated, fed. We received the utmost care from the Church who had brought together thousands of religious to Rome on several occasions this year, for a veritable banquet. On this trip, the workshop days included a symposium with plenary sessions at Paul VI Hall and smaller sessions at various locations around the city.

Fully engaging our opportunities in the Eternal City, our group began at the start of the pilgrim route to St. Peter's, where volunteers of mercy provided prayer resources and the pilgrim cross. Organized by the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, the Jubilee of Mercy pilgrim route includes several holy stops along the way. Meditating on the psalms of mercy recalled the incredible blessings we American religious have experienced in this Year of Consecrated Life: the nearness of the Holy Father in America, the tangible joy and unity we experienced at the Symposium in St. Louis this November reflecting on prophecy and communion, and Pope Francis' beautiful words to us February 1, confirming the path which members of the Council have embraced in love through its nearly 25 year history: "... an obedience of giving of the heart. This is prophecy."

We found over the course of two weeks numerous Holy Doors, priests hearing confessions for lines of penitents, Chaplets of Mercy prayed and sung, and many poor, who seem to have a sparkle in their eyes these days. Perhaps they have a new awareness that God's mercy is for them, too. And that makes all the difference.



CMSWR members bring the pilgrim cross into St. Peter's Basilica.



Catholic Young Women's Leadership Forum

Cultivating Authentic Femininity for the Life of the Church

By Sister Marsaia Kaster, OSF

What words can describe the amazing work of the Holy Spirit in bringing forth this project called the GIVEN FORUM? From June 7–12, the CMSWR will crown the recent Year of Consecrated Life by hosting 300 young Catholic women leaders, ages 20–30, from across the country, at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. The week will be devoted to pondering and exploring St. John Paul II's concept of the feminine genius. Young women attendees have been handpicked from a host of applicants. These young women are already on fire with love for the Lord and their faith and desire to serve others in every walk of life. The week will give them opportunities to hear from more than a dozen profoundly professional, deeply committed Catholic women who will share their stories, faith, insights, and talents.

As I serve on the core committee, seeing this event being woven together is a phenomenally moving faith experience. I marvel at what these young women will experience this summer. I anticipate being totally blown away by the Action Plans that each of the participants will develop and take back to her parish or workplace. Our culture unknowingly hungers to experience the graciousness and beauty of the feminine genius and to see each woman as a beloved daughter of God.

We as a country have also desperately needed to have wonderful Catholic women, many of whom have had little or no experience with religious, to experience the beauty of consecrated life. This will happen this summer as over 50 religious sisters accompany groups of young women throughout the week. What a great opportunity for participants to experience firsthand the joyful witness of those who live the consecrated life. I am filled with hope as I ponder what effects this event may have in the life of the Catholic Church in America. It is a great privilege to assist in whatever ways we can. Certainly we can all cover the event with prayer!



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ESPOSAS DE CRISTO, HIJAS DE LA IGLESIA Summer 2016

Please consider sponsoring a Spanish-speaking religious Sister to attend a two-week theological course in Spanish, *Spouses of Christ, Daughters of the Church*, at Pax Christi Liturgical Retreat Center, Corpus Christi, TX.

Your contribution of \$325 will provide full room and board, all course materials, and local transportation.

To sponsor a Sister, see details on the enclosed envelope.

Thank you for your support of CMSWR!