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## **Leadership Assembly Explores Gifts of 19,000 U.S. Religious Men and Installs a New President**

(August 13, 2007, Cleveland, Ohio). The leaders of the Catholic Religious Orders of men in the United States gathered in Cleveland, Ohio for the annual assembly from August 10 – 13 at the Renaissance Cleveland Hotel. Building on the theme of their 2006 Jubilee Assembly which characterized the diverse gifts of each religious community as a composite “Coat of Many Colors,” participants at the 2007 Assembly explored the many gifts or charisms that each community brings to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ through their lived-out experience and ministry in the United States.

Elaborating on this year’s Assembly theme, “*Enhancing our Charisms, Living Out Our Religious Life*,” Paul Lininger, OFM Conv., Executive Director of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) which coordinates the assembly of major superiors each year, said that “as religious men we are called and gifted witnesses to the Spirit in the Church and throughout the world. And through our multiple and diverse charisms we celebrate the endless possibilities of loving God.”

Major superiors and councilors were joined by vocation directors and development directors from around the country for a pre-assembly workshop entitled, “*Charism and Mission: Proclaiming Who We Are with Authenticity & Enthusiastically Inviting Others to Participate*,” where they heard suggestions on how better present their unique gifts to members of the Church and society. Sister Georgette Lehmuth, OSF, President and CEO of the National Catholic Development Conference was the leading presenter at the pre-assembly workshop.

The Assembly was honored to have the active participation of His Eminence, Cardinal Franc Rodé, CM, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, throughout the conference. He presided at the principal Eucharistic Liturgy on Sunday. Bishop J. Terry Steib, SVD, Bishop of the Diocese of Memphis, delivered the homily. Bishop Steib was also a participating member of the Assembly both as a representative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and as Chair of the Commission on Religious Life and Ministry.

On Sunday morning, Cardinal Rodé delivered an address to the assembled religious leaders after which he engaged in a question and answer session.

During his presentation, the Cardinal summarized the rise and history of religious life in the Church, from the Church’s earliest days, as the response of those who sensed the need “*to more radically conform their lives to the teachings of the Gospel, to live a life of radical poverty, chastity, and obedience in imitation of the Jesus whom they had come to know personally.*”

Referring to the needs of today, Cardinal Rodé said that, as religious leaders, *“we must ask ourselves what are the challenges which consecrated persons must respond to today in “creative fidelity” to the mission entrusted to them for the growth for the Kingdom? Consecrated persons must realize that no matter what their apostolic commitments might entail, their primary mission is that of witnessing to the values of the kingdom. Their lives and actions must clearly show that the message of Jesus is the only message which offers the way to eternal life.”*

Sister Laurie Brink, OP, a Dominican Sister of Sinsinawa and Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, led the participants in reflections on the scripture story of Pentecost throughout the Assembly. Major addresses were presented by Marist Brother Seán D. Sammon, FMS, Dominican Prioress Donna Markham OP, and Oblate Missionary Ronald Rolheiser, OMI. Participants were engaged in a sometimes emotional presentation by a panel of four presenters who represented the work of religious men and women in the response to Hurricane Katrina. Mary Baudouin, Perry Henry, CM, Eugene Patin, CSsR, and Sister Sylvia Thibodeaux, SSF collaborated in the presentation entitled *“Katrina Two Years Later – Out of Our Charisms.”*

At the business meeting on Monday, major superiors chose new At-Large Members of the National Board. Brother Francis Carr, FSC, Provincial of the Midwest Province of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (De La Salle Christian Brothers) was elected for a three-year term and Father Clyde Phillips, MM, the U.S. Regional Superior (Provincial) of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers was re-elected for an additional three-year term.

At a prayer service concluding the assembly, Father Thomas Picton, CSsR, Provincial of the Redemptorists of the Denver Province, was installed as the 20<sup>th</sup> President of the Conference (CMSM), succeeding Father Dominic Izzo, OP, who completed his two-year term. Father Picton has been participating in national religious leadership in CMSM for many years, first representing Region 4 of the Conference as Chair and then as an At-Large member of the CMSM Board before being chosen President-Elect at the 2006 Assembly.

Prior to being elected provincial superior of the Denver Province, Father Picton was vice provincial of the New Orleans Vice-Province from 1999 to 2005. From 1994 to 1999, Father Picton served as pastoral psychotherapist at the Catholic Consultation Center in San Antonio, Texas. Father Picton professed his religious vows in August 1968 and was ordained a Redemptorist priest in June of 1971. Father Picton is a native of Rockport, Texas.