

InterAmerican Network Seeks to Build Solidarity Among the Religious of the Americas

More than 50 representatives of the leadership conferences of women and men religious met from May 4-7, 2005 to explore ways of increasing the solidarity among religious throughout the Americas. The meeting, the VIII InterAmerican Conference, took place in Itaici, Brazil, two hours outside of Sao Paulo and included representatives from the Leadership Conference of Women, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the Canadian Religious Conference and the Confederation of Latin American Religious.



The LCWR delegation to the InterAmerican Conference: Christine Vladimiroff, OSB; Jeanne Bessette, OSF; Dorothy Jean Beyer, OSB; Beatrice Eichten, OSF; Constance Phelps, SCL; Carole Shinnick, SSND; Marie Lucey, OSF; Mary Catherine Rabbitt, SL; and Annmarie Sanders, IHM.

The delegates, including six LCWR board members and three LCWR national office staff members, worked throughout the four days to create mission and vision statements and an action plan for the next five years for the InterAmerican Network. The action plan will be presented as part of the report to the LCWR

national board at its August meeting.

The LCWR delegation, with input from the LCWR national board, had met earlier in the year to compile a list of the social, economic, political and cultural issues affecting

life in the United States, and the impact of these issues on religious life. The delegation members had also suggested ways in which the leadership conferences throughout the Americas could continue to work to-

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VIII InterAmerican Conference logo

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From the LCWR Presidency
Making the Message of Pentecost Clear

by Christine Vladimiroff, OSB -- LCWR President

It wasn't Pentecost when the InterAmerican Conference gathered in Brazil. The wind and fire were not evident. The chatter and cacophony English, French, Spanish and Portuguese filled the hallways, the dining room and auditorium as we discussed the issues before us. The gift of understanding each person who spoke in his or her native tongue was painfully absent. Even with translation, we did not receive the full communication of the emotion and passion that words in one language could not convey in another. We stretched to hear and really listen to the interventions, knowing that they came out of a distinct culture, tradition and experiences that we did not share. We prayed as we struggled knowing that achieving authentic unity requires us to listen to the spirit in the other.

Sharing a commitment to religious life—the Canadian Conference of Religious, the Confederation of Latin American Religious (23 conferences) and LCWR and CMSM engaged in dialog to craft a vision of collaboration in the Americas. Globalization of efforts to extend God's reign of peace and justice on a continent was an ambitious undertaking. At times we all retreated into the safe and known of our parochial vision puzzled that all did not see it as we did. We did not want to be disturbed by another way of thinking. But grace prevailed, an anticipation of the feast of Pentecost, and we renewed our efforts to speak with one voice, navigating the diversity to come to a unity that captured and was enriched by the differences.

In full view of the assembly there was an enormous poster of Dorothy Stang, SNdeN. Her image brought to me a realization of the price we might be asked to pay if we take the gospel seriously. Her love erased artificial borders that kept her from sharing life with the poor in another country. She spoke out boldly to defend their rights against the power structures that exploited them. She was killed. Her spirit has sparked a movement in Brazil. It is a testimony of a life given in the pursuit of justice.



I, then, reflected on the four women who were murdered in El Salvador and the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, American religious, who threw their lot in with the poor and were massacred in Liberia. We have our heroes and they speak to us powerfully and very simply without words. The unilateralism of our government has alienated many and our arrogance, as a nation, in such efforts as CAFTA, takes advantage of and marginalizes the poor. As religious, we must join the struggle across borders to give witness and invest in a new Pentecost of understanding.

The Spirit is given to the Church for large issues, to be signs of goodness, to be capable to love unto death and beyond death, to bring a justice that is stronger than hate, to extend forgiveness, to repair what was destroyed and make it whole, to redeem every situation that lacks God's presence and love. Jesus breathes on us in the same manner, as the breath of God stirred the waters of creation. We are sent into the world as Jesus was sent, but with the Spirit of Jesus to sustain us, enlighten us, give us courage and speak and work through us. Brazil made the message of Pentecost clear to me.



Beatrice Eichten, OSF; Christine Vladimiroff, OSB; and Constance Phelps, SCL at the InterAmerican Conference

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gether. This information became the basis for the work of the first day of the InterAmerican Conference.

During the subsequent days, the delegates worked together in four languages -- Portuguese, Spanish, French and English -- on developing a mission statement for the InterAmerican Network. They next worked to visualize how this mission could be lived out during the coming five years. This work led to the creation of objectives and an action plan for the network.

InterAmerican Conferences have been held approximately every five years since 1971. In addition to the conferences, the InterAmerican Committee meets annually to foster the collaboration among the conferences. Members of the InterAmerican Committee are the presidents and executive directors/secretaries of LCWR, CMSM, CRC, and CLAR.

Highlights of the VIII InterAmerican Conference included the prayer services, rituals and Eucharistic liturgies prepared by each conference. Many of these experiences wove in actions of solidarity by the participants with those walking in a two-week massive march taking place in Brazil to protest the government's economic policies toward the thousands of landless campesinos. The march participants, including 45 women religious, were scheduled to walk 210 kilometers in an effort to create awareness of the need for agrarian reform. Those walking slept in tents each night in outdoor fields, thus the symbol of the tent was prominent in the prayer and reflection of the InterAmerican participants.

The InterAmerican Network also sent a letter of solidarity to the religious of Haiti.

During the conference the delegates traveled for part of one day to Sao Paulo where they toured an after-school center that serves approximately 7000 disadvantaged children and young people daily.

[Click here](#) to view on the LCWR website more information on and photos of the InterAmerican Conference, or go directly to www.lcwr.org and go to "Programs and Resources."

InterAmerican Network Mission Statement

We are a network of organizations of men and women religious leaders of the Americas, attentive to the call of God that speaks to us through the world in which we live.

We unite to strengthen our bonds, to make our communications more effective and to deepen the collaboration among the women and men religious from the North to the South of the Americas.

In fidelity to our mystical-prophetic vocation of religious life, we commit ourselves to hearing and living the Word of God -- a catalyst for conversion and social/ecclesial transformation.

We are confident that a different world is possible, and we commit to joint actions that favor the creation of just, equitable, and nonviolent relationships.



The VIII InterAmerican meeting site in Itaici, Brazil



The closing liturgy of the InterAmerican Conference

LCWR to Be Represented at 60th Anniversary Commemoration of Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

At the request of the Major Superiors' Association of Religious Women of Japan, Beatrice Eichten, OSF, LCWR vice-president, will participate in commemorative events in Japan on August 6 and August 9 as the representative of LCWR. The objective of her trip is to "articulate a commitment to peace and reconciliation as the religious of two nations that suffered a violence that should never be repeated." Statements from the Japanese Conference and LCWR will be issued at the same event, with Bea reading the LCWR statement which she and the executive committee have prepared. (Note: when completed, the statements will be on the LCWR web site.)



LCWR members are encouraged to invite the members of their congregations to engage in the activities below in solidarity with the people of Japan:

1. Participate in local events being held to commemorate the 60th Anniversary.
2. Select, as a congregation, August 6 or August 9 as a day of prayer and fast that both nations will work for true peace and reconciliation. Invite others to participate in prayer services held by congregations and/or regions.
3. Send messages to President Bush, members of the Congress, and the media, calling for an end to all development, testing, and use of nuclear weapons and support for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
4. LCWR members who have a congregational presence in Japan are encouraged to inform these members about LCWR's representation in Japan, invite them to participate in these events, and inform Bea Eichten if they, LCWR members, plan to travel to Japan for the 60th anniversary commemoration.

LCWR Jubilee Commemoration Plans Move Forward

Plans for commemorating the LCWR 50th jubilee are being shaped in many of the LCWR regions as well as on the national level. A recent meeting of the LCWR Jubilee Committee provided an update on the following plans:

- continued exploration by the LCWR Jubilee History Committee of the possibility of mounting an exhibit at the Smithsonian. The exhibit would focus on the vital role women religious have played in shaping American social, religious and civil history.
- sharing ideas on creative uses of the *Leading from Within* manual that can be adapted for use by regions and congregational leadership teams
- the distribution of media kits that will contain helpful information to assist members in publicizing local commemorations of the LCWR jubilee.

Many LCWR regions already have plans in place for celebrating the 50th anniversary in creative ways. Highlights of these plans will be included in the media kits.

LCWR and CMSM Welcome New Staff Member

LCWR and CMSM recently welcomed Carol Glidden as their new receptionist-secretary. Carol is returning to the work force after being a "stay-at-home mom" for the past 12 years with her son, Ben.



Previously, Carol worked in the banking business for 15 years and in more recent years provided temporary support services to her parish and son's school, St. Mark in Hyattsville, Maryland. LCWR is grateful for the variety of gifts and experience Carol has to share with both conferences.

Reflections on a Visit to Cuba

Last year LCWR notified its members that Witness for Peace was leading a delegation to Cuba and desired the presence of a woman religious leader in the group. Several LCWR members volunteered to go and from among them, Witness for Peace selected Maria Luisa Vera, RSM from the Sisters of Mercy Institute leadership team. Maria Luisa shares her reflections on the experience.

by Maria Luisa Vera, RSM

It is hard for me to believe that the Berlin Wall has come down; that Nelson Mandela is a free man; that the Soviet bloc has restructured; but Cuba and the United States are still at odds. People are suffering in Cuba and in the United States as a result of strong and stubborn egos on both sides of the 90 mile stretch of water where the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico meet.

Here are a few of my observations while in Cuba with a Witness for Peace delegation. The purpose of the delegation was to get a better sense of how US policy impacts peoples' lives. Our host was the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, a Baptist Church community committed to nonviolence. We visited a school for severely physically disabled children. The children are assisted to develop to their fullest potential within the personal and the material limitations they experience daily. A few of the children shared some original songs with the

We all need to start paying more attention to policies and upcoming legislation regarding Cuba.

delegation. They seemed to be very well cared for by very professional and committed staff. We also visited the Medical School of Latin America located on the campus of a former naval camp. Young people from all over Latin America, some African countries and five young men from the United States are currently en-

rolled in this medical school. Tuition, room and board are free to all students. Their education and training are directed toward primary medicine and the students are sent to developing countries to practice during the last two years of their six-year program. The Cuban people place a high value on education and overall Cuba has a 95% literacy rate. What we did not see were children or anyone else begging or sleeping on the street. Someone said to me, "It is not allowed." We did not see trash and litter on the streets.

Cuba defines itself as a secular-socialist state where people have the freedom to practice their religion. President Fidel Castro does not care what religion the people practice as long as they are "good Cubans." The president declared three days of mourning after the death of Pope John Paul II; all sports events and concerts were cancelled and the flags were at half staff. He attended services at a Catholic church and signed a memorial book. I found the people warm, friendly, caring, poor and proud. They love the American people but have issues with the American government.

A month after my visit to Cuba I have some lingering thoughts: 1) Cuba is not in the consciousness of most American people until something shows up in the popular media. 2) The restrictions on travel by the US government place an undue burden to Cuban-Americans who wish to go visit family. 3) Other US groups and delegations are being restricted from visiting Cuba due to licenses not being renewed by the US Department of the Treasury, including Witness for Peace. 4) We all need to start paying more attention to policies and upcoming legislation regarding Cuba.



NETWORK Board Expresses Gratitude to LCWR and Women Religious

Due to the increasing diversity of the NETWORK board and staff, some members are not familiar with the strong historical connection between the organization and women religious, including the relationship with LCWR. During the April 28-May 1 board meeting, a major agenda item focused on this relationship — past, present, and future. A historical context was presented by LCWR's associate director of social mission who serves ex officio on the board and coordinating council. A brief overview was provided of the changes and transitions in religious life as lived by US women religious during the past 40 years.

An entire morning was given to a process developed by Katrina Thill, RSM who serves on the NEP (NETWORK Education Program) board, and Marie Lucey, OSF, tracing the historical relationship between LCWR and NETWORK in order to enable board members to assess and project this relationship into the future. Board members were very appreciative of the process and the information provided. Deep gratitude was expressed for the contributions of women religious to the founding and sustaining of NETWORK during its 34-year history. The board hopes for a continued strong relationship with women religious through participative membership, even as the diversity of the organization continues to expand. Board members also hope for continued LCWR ex-officio membership on the board.

During the meeting the results of the recent membership survey were shared and discussed, and proposed revisions of NETWORK by-laws were reviewed and approved. The NETWORK office moved to 25 E Street NW, prompted by flooding in the basement of the former office space, has proved very satisfactory to staff.

Correction for *In the Sound of the Gentle Breeze*:

The author of the June 26 reflection is incorrectly listed as Virginia Cahill, SHSp rather than Veronica Cahill, SHSp. Our apologies to Veronica for this error.



Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking Meets

On May 11 approximately 25 members of the Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking met to share information, listen to a guest speaker from the Department of Defense, receive an update on current legislation, and learn more about the Immigration Reform Program launched officially by the US Catholic bishops the previous day.

John Awtrey, director of the DOD Office of Law Enforcement Policy and Support, described his agency's anti-trafficking efforts which focus on education of two groups: US military personnel preparing to go overseas, and DOD contractors. The reauthorization of the anti-trafficking bill, introduced by Representative Chris Smith of New Jersey, is due for mark-up within the next few weeks. One breakthrough that has occurred is that children (under 18) can now receive assistance from referrals by individuals and agencies other than law enforcement, e.g. lawyers and social service agencies.

LRCR Holds Annual Renewal Drive

The Legal Resource Center for Religious (LRCR) is beginning its annual subscription renewal. LRCR is sustained by subscription/service fees that entitle members to publications and access to the Law Library on its web site and access to consultation services of staff attorneys and canonists. In addition subscribers are entitled to discounted rates for the Legal Seminar and for in-person consultation for their institutes.

The mission of LRCR is to: serve as a locus for the integration of civil law, canon law and the spirit of religious life; provide legal education and consultation for Catholic religious and their professional advisors; and identify trends, articulate implications, make recommendations and take action on legal issues affecting religious within US society and the Church, in cooperation with LCWR, CMSM, NATRI and other organizations.

Renewal notices have been mailed to current and recent subscribers of LRCR services. Leaders who would like to take advantage of this invaluable service, and have not received a renewal form, may contact LRCR at 301-589-8143 or on the web at www.LRCR.org/mission/subscription/subscrip.htm; the subscription form is at the bottom of that page.

From the LCWR Executive Director
California, Here We Come

In a few months LCWR's jubilee year will open at the 2005 assembly in Anaheim, California. I have two words for you: "Be there!" Every LCWR assembly is a wonderful event, but I promise you that this assembly, launching our fiftieth anniversary cannot be missed.



Carole Shinnick, SSND

The assembly of 2005 reflects the confluence of three LCWR committees – the Jubilee Committee, the Goal Setting Committee for 2004-2009, and the Assembly Planning Committee. Each committee in its meetings had prayed with the jubilee readings from Leviticus and from Luke 4, as well as with a poem by Christopher Fry. Each group in its prayer was struck by the same line from Fry:

*Thank God our time is now when wrong
 Comes up to face us everywhere...¹*

It is so easy to focus on the challenges and apparent burdens of our time in religious life – discouraging statistics, the loss of traditional ministries, an uneasy sense of displacement within our church and society. "But," each group asked, "what if these realities – these very difficulties facing us everywhere – were God's gift to us in our time? What if these seeming obstacles were the building blocks of our future? What if we saw this time – our one and only time – as a time of God's special favor?"

For that reason, the Goal Setting Committee broke tradition, declining to use the usual goals-and-objectives format, and opening *The LCWR Call* with a prologue that proclaims:

...Inspired by the radical call of the Gospel, led by God's Spirit and companioned by one another, we embrace our time as holy, our leadership as gift, and our challenges as blessings.

And for similar reasons, the Assembly Planning Committee chose as the assembly title: *Proclaim God's Favor – Our Time is Now!*

I believe that this assembly will be nothing less than a Pentecost moment for LCWR. I trust that a synergy will flame up among us gathered in Anaheim, and that our collective sacred conversation will lead us to a new and unexpected place. The Assembly Planning Committee did not want the fiftieth anniversary celebration to be just "a trip down Memory Lane" or an introspective exercise in self-congratulations. Rather they hoped the assembly would be an opportunity to remember God's grace of the past, to celebrate God's favor in the present, and to claim God's unfailing promise for the future.

So come to Anaheim. Please don't miss the opening of the LCWR jubilee year. Join us in celebrating the past and heading for the future. Like the dancers from Bob Fosse's *A Chorus Line* we can all leave singing:

*Kiss today goodbye,
 And point me toward tomorrow
 We did what we had to do –
 Won't forget, can't regret
 What I did for love.²*

¹ From *A Sleep of Prisoners* by Christopher Fry (1951)

² From *A Chorus Line*, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim (1970)



Upcoming LCWR Dates

LCWR Assembly

Anaheim, California

August 19, 2005

Registration: 1:00 - 6:00 PM

Opening of Assembly: 7:00 PM

August 22, 2005

Assembly adjourns after LCWR Banquet

August 23, 2005

Departure and Travel Day

LCWR-CMSM Delegation to El Salvador

November 30 -- December 6, 2005

LCWR Leading from Within Retreat

Mater Dolorosa Passionist Retreat Center

Sierra Madre, California

January 15 -- 20, 2006

LCWR Systemic Change Think Tank,

Franciscan Center -- Tampa, Florida

February 12 -- 14, 2006

LCWR New Leader Workshop

St. Mary of the Lake -- Mundelein, Illinois

March 30 -- April 2, 2006

LCWR Assembly

Atlanta, Georgia

August 18 -- 22, 2006

LCWR Assembly

New Orleans, Louisiana

August 2 -- 6, 2007

FROM THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Current CSRL Projects

Young Religious' Reflections

More than 200 surveys were e-mailed to women and men religious 40 and younger during the past month. They were asked what religious life means to them and what they dream for the future of religious life in this country. Their responses will be collected in the book, *Young Religious' Reflections*, which will be published in July. Members of CSRL will receive a complimentary copy.

Cultural Audit Workshops

The workshop, "Using the Cultural Audit," will be held in Chicago at Catholic Theological Union August 11-13, 2005 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. Presenters will be Frances Cunningham, OSF and Rudy Vela, SM who have conducted several of these workshops for the center. Gary Riebe-Estrella, SVD, academic dean and associate professor of practical theology and Hispanic ministry at Catholic Theological Union, will also assist with the workshop. Information and a registration form are available online at www.religious-life.org.

For those planning ahead, another cultural audit workshop is scheduled for February 5-8, 2006 at Marywood Center in Jacksonville, Florida. This workshop begins at 3 p.m. on Sunday, February 5 and ends with lunch on Wednesday, February 8. The leaders for this workshop will be Gary Riebe-Estrella, SVD and Caroljean Willie, SC, cultural diversity consultant with a PhD in multicultural education. Both of them have worked with a number of religious congregations on culture. Further information will be available next month.

Kindling

The summer issue of CSRL's newsletter, *Kindling*, will highlight how various groups have used the center's cultural audit and will include information on other intercultural, cross-cultural and diversity resources along with a bibliography.

The word "Update" is written in a large, orange, cursive font over a background of colorful, abstract brushstrokes in shades of blue, purple, and red.

Update is an official publication of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious published monthly and distributed to members nationally.

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