

## Press release UCESM General Assembly 19-25 March 2012 – Lourdes (France)

UCESM (Union of European Conferences of Major Superiors) held its General Assembly between 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> March in Lourdes, France. The **theme** of the conference was: «**Life as a Vocation**», Jeremiah 1:4 «*The word of the Lord was revealed to me*». The conference was hosted by CORREF, the Conference of Religious of France, and it brought together 100 participants.



The meeting began on **Monday** with the celebration of the Eucharist at 6:00 pm, presided over by the Vice-President of UCESM, Father Manuel Barbosa scj.

The official start took place at 8:00 pm with the opening address of the President, Sr Lutgardis Craeynest fma, when she declared the fifteenth General Assembly open. Fr. Horacio Brito, Rector of the Lourdes Sanctuary, welcomed the participants. He explained how the life of Saint Bernadette helped us to understand how “life is a vocation”.

Among those present was His Excellency Monsignor Joseph W. Tobin cssr, Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Mgr Tobin took the floor as keynote speaker to assist the members in their reflection on the theme. As well as the members of the Executive and Secretariat, also present were the member participants of UCESM. Together with representatives of Lay Christian associates, with whom UCESM collaborate.

During the week, other civil and ecclesiastical figures spoke to the Assembly and helped to deepen the reflection on the theme.

Sr Maureen Cusick nds moderated the Assembly.

**During the morning of the second day**, each of the 27 European members present addressed the Assembly with a brief presentation.

Mgr Tobin, the keynote speaker, gave his first talk, beginning with the concept ‘Life as a pilgrimage’ offering three main points on the vocation theme.

What is the most important religious vow for Consecrated Life in Europe? It is obedience – listening in common to the word of God.

The link between vocation and professional life of men and women religious in Europe: professionalism. It is important but the service required by those called to religious life can never be merely a matter of competencies and skills.

He emphasised the need to understand the religious vocation as the mystery of alliance with others and with God. When mystery disappears from that relationship then love begins to die.



CORREF organised a pilgrimage in the footsteps of Bernadette in the afternoon. It began with her time with her family up until the first encounter with the Madonna, tracing the first steps in the Christian faith of this confidante of Mary. The day was brought to a meaningful end when members watched the film 'Of Gods and men'.

On **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup>**, there was a feedback on the pilgrimage and the film.

Then, Mgr Tobin gave the second part of his keynote address, beginning with the first Christian communities in Europe (ref. Philippians) as also described in the Acts of Apostles – Chapter 16. It enabled us to connect Paul's experience with an understanding of the mission of religious life in Europe today. In particular, he emphasized the joy which Paul's letter to the Philippians projects to us. This gives us courage for ling 'mission' today.



The day concluded with the witness of five young religious from different European countries, Br. Benoît (Taizé, France) – Sr Nathalie Becquart (France) – Sr Inese Lietaviete (Latvia) – Sr Katarzyna Król (Poland) and Fr. Ricardo Freire (Portugal). Underpinning the values of their consecration are: embracing Christ in their lives, listening to the word of God, prayer and adoration, service to Christ and the Church, being a witness, creative, joyful life because of this union with Christ.

That afternoon, Mr. Robert Rochefort, MEP elected by 'Modern Democracy' for the South-West of France. He spoke of the importance of 'vocation' as a spiritual experience, not necessarily linked to any religion. He also emphasized the question of transmission of values, with particular attention to the signs of hope present in European societies.



The various language groups met at the end of the afternoon to deepen reflection on questions put to them by Mgr. Tobin: what is the gift of religious life to Europe today? How can UCESM help religious life to transmit this gift? There was a feedback session from the groups that evening. This brought to a close the first part of the Assembly and the resulting conclusions will be presented in the final message.

**The second part of the General Assembly** was given over to the contribution of guest speakers who presented their involvement with the various European, international and North American ecclesial bodies on the theme of this meeting: "Life as a vocation".

One morning was devoted to the religious conferences of Slovenia, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Rumania and Germany who informed the assembly of the projects underway in their countries as well as the challenges posed by the present socio-economic situation.

The elections of the new Executive Committee were preceded by the reports of the President, Treasurer and General Secretary.

**Father Giovanni PERAGINE crsp**, President of the **Albanian** Conference, was elected **President of UCESM**

**Sr Viviana BALLARIN op**, President of USMI (**Italian Major Superiors' Conference**), was elected **Vice-President**

**Father Mariano SEDANO SIERRA cmf** of the Russian Conference was elected **Councillor**

**Sr Ivanka MIHALJEVIC**, President of the **Bosnia-Herzegovina Conference**, was elected **Councillor**.



In the morning of Saturday 24 March, Mgr. Jean-Louis Papin, President of the Bishops' Commission for Consecrated Life in France, joined the Assembly where Sr Nicoletta Spezzati, Under-Secretary of CICLSAL, an attentive observer since the very start, gave the Assembly a summary of the meeting's deliberations. She concluded by referring to the Virgin Mary's request to Bernadette: "Would you please come back?", a still topical question for opening the way to a new life for all.



The young religious from Portugal, France, Poland and Latvia were responsible for drafting the **final message "The voice of the future"**. After being amended by the Assembly, the message was approved on the last day.

Prayers and liturgical celebrations accompanied our days, especially Friday's Eucharist, presided over by Mgr Ventura, Apostolic Nuncio for France, at the conclusion of the day of elections, as well as the closing Eucharist of Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> of March, presided over by the new President of UCESM, Father Giovanni Peragine.

