

Restructuring Men's Religious Communities:

A Question of Mission A Question of Worth

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“Restructuring is a commitment of fidelity,” writes CMSM president Stephen Glodek, SM, in this issue of the *Forum*. It is fidelity, he continues, that will help his community “refound our charism in this time and in this culture.”

Through its focus statement, “New Life for the Mission of Christ,” CMSM has in the past few years focused assemblies and publications on helping members explore interior and exterior mission, ways of regenerating or finding new life, and the mission of male religious life within the mission of the Church.

One topic that has come up again and again, especially in relationship to mission, is restructuring. Several men’s communities have merged or reconfigured provinces in the last decade, most to create a greater body of men for the mission or to streamline administrative matters. The communities have been diverse and the results mixed.

In this issue of the *Forum* we do not make an attempt to scientifically study the process

of restructuring, but rather, we seek to uncover the wisdom of those who are in the process or who have undertaken restructuring in their provinces.

We begin with the CMSM president’s experience of the Marianists, who are bringing together four of their provinces in the United States into one being. They will inaugurate their new province in the summer of 2002. In this article, Brother Stephen reflects on the impetus to restructure and calls the process, “a statement of faith.”

Next, we look at the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who completed a restructuring just two years ago. Provincial David Kalert writes on the benefits of the result, and warns of the intensity of the process.

Finally, Redemptorist David Thibodeau takes a longer view, writing more than five years after two provinces in the United States combined. The challenges continue, he tells us, in living authentic community life, understanding the vows, and attracting solid vocations. Would he do it again? He answers yes, calling the process

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“an opportunity to creatively look at today as well as the future: Where do we want to be in five years, in ten years?”

The most striking commonality in this set of articles is the emphasis each community has placed on mission as the standard. “We have to show how this new structure is helping us to define anew, with renewed energy, our Marianist response to the critical needs of our culture,” says Brother Stephen. Otherwise, he continues, “we are engaging in administration reshuffling which will make no long term difference to the mission ...” Father David echoes that tone, saying the process is worth it, “provided it is indeed for the sake of the mission.” Otherwise, he too says, “we are simply going through a lot of motions to tidy up the Titanic ...”

Mission was also found to be the most important issue in a study of women’s religious communities who engaged in or

attempted restructuring or merger. Two publications called *A Critical Juncture: Assessing the Viability of Religious Institutes* name centrality of mission or “a corporate preoccupation with witnessing to the Gospel through ministry, spirituality, and community life,” as the most important element for viability. The publications by LCWR, NATRI and the National Religious Retirement Office have been used by many communities as preparation for renewal or reconfiguration.

Each author in this issue of the *Forum* answered yes to our question, “Is it worth it?” But all qualified that answer, “if only for the mission.” Each of our authors is in a different stage of the restructuring process. But all, certainly, bring to bear their wisdom of leadership in a time of transition, a wisdom that they now share generously with all CMSM members.

- Ted Keating, SM