



Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America

A Province of the Congregation of Christian Brothers

Conference of Major Superiors of Men
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One in the Mission of Christ: Co-responsibility in Religious Leadership

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Good day everyone. After nearly three years of living life virtually, by way of Zoom, Skype, Google Meet and other platforms, it is good for us to be here in Buffalo...in person, face to face, Brother to Brother.

Allow me to begin my report by sharing with you a brief sketch of who I am and how I came to be speaking before you today.

As a young man, growing up in the small suburban community of New Rochelle, NY, located just fifteen miles from mid-town Manhattan, I dreamed of becoming a sports broadcast journalist. I wanted to be the play-by-play announcer for the NY Yankees. Were that not possible for me, my fallback position was to one day take over my grandfather's Italian American delicatessen in New Rochelle.

Clearly, as I stand here today, neither of these dreams became a reality. So, you might ask, what went so right with my life that these dreams never came to fruition.

Well, in 1975, I had the good fortune of meeting the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers at Blessed Sacrament High School in New Rochelle. By the time I graduated in 1979, I knew that I wanted to be a Christian Brother. I knew that God's call in my life was to develop a personal relationship with the Risen Jesus, so that I could follow in the footsteps of my high school teachers in being of service to others, as they had been to me.

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So, in September of 1979, I, along with eleven other young men, joined the Christian Brother Postulancy program at Iona College...a short seven minute walk from my childhood home. Novitiate followed in upstate New York...First Profession of Vows in 1981...Back to Iona College for Scholasticate...where in 1983, I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English...a minor in Religious Studies...and provisional certification to teach English in NYS.

My four years in initial formation gave me a foundation in prayer and community life that has served me well as a Religious Brother.

As a Novice in 1981, I had the privilege of being accompanied on a directed retreat by the renowned Capuchin Priest, Fr. Benedict Groeschel, who asked me to read Victor Frankl's account of the holocaust – *Man's Search for Meaning*. In my daily sessions with Fr. Benedict, I can still hear him saying, "Kevin, always be open to the premise that God writes straight with crooked lines." I will come back to this line later in my remarks.

Fellow members of CMSM, the theme for our assembly here in Buffalo is: ***One in the Mission of Christ: Co-Responsibility in Religious Leadership.***

As Consecrated Religious today, this theme speaks to us in unique and profound ways.

It is clear from the title that our mission, regardless of our Religious Institute, must be about proclaiming the **Mission of Christ**. It is Christ's mission...so well delineated in the Gospels...that we are called to embrace and bring to others.

It is clear in the title that we, all of us who profess Religious Vows...are called to work together, as one, collaboratively and in concert with one another...to bring the Gospel message of Jesus to all those we are privileged to serve.

As we all know, each of our groups has a particular charism within the Church that has been passed down through the generations beginning with our Founders. Today, we, all of us, are being called to examine our vision, our mission and our values, as we accept the challenge for **Co-Responsibility in Religious Life**.

Pope Francis reminds us that “our deepest joy comes from Christ: walking with him, being his disciples” and that “the Holy Spirit transforms and renews us, creates harmony and unity, and gives us courage and joy for mission.”

Brothers, our task is to welcome this challenge of being **Co-Responsible**. As such, this challenge begs the question...with whom are we **Co-Responsible**?

I would suggest that first and foremost, we are **Co-Responsible** with our Creator God. In *Laudato Si'*, we read: “Human beings are part of creation. The world does not belong to us, it belongs to God the Creator...Our fulfillment as people, as Catholics, and as Christians, depends on the relationship of care that we establish with the world. Thus, the commitment to our common home is not optional; we are called by God to be caretakers of creation.”

So, yes, I would propose that first and foremost we are **Co-Responsible** as Co-Creators with the God of all creation.

Secondly, I would suggest that we are **Co-Responsible** with each other. As humans, we share this planet with all God’s creation; we especially share it with our brothers and sisters around the globe. We live in an interdependent, interconnected world, and we have a responsibility...a **Co-Responsibility**...to be ever conscious of our role in it.

Again, in the words of Pope Francis, “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it...we need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family.”

As one single human family, we must accept the call for shared responsibility...as is outlined in encyclicals like *Laudato Si' and Fratelli Tutti*, as well as in many other recent writings by both Religious and secular authors. Why, because we are **Co-Responsible** with one another for the **Mission of Christ** and for **Religious Leadership** in today's world.

As Consecrated Religious, we know that the poor and marginalized in our midst are often neglected and/or ignored. Many of our institutions were founded to respond to specific concerns facing the poor. These concerns became our Founding Charisms and remain so today. I would propose that part of our **Co-Responsibility in Religious Life** is in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. In faithfulness to being **One in the Mission of Christ**, we must be the ones who offer hope to those most in need of it.

There are many more answers to my question...with whom are we **Co-Responsible**? My limited suggestions here are not meant to be all inclusive. In fact, they are just a start.

Allow me; however, at this point to shift my remarks to how I believe CMSM can, and often does, provide us with ways to recognize that we are indeed **One in the Mission of Christ**, as well as ways in which CMSM points us in the direction of embracing **Co-Responsibility in Religious Leadership**.

Who of us can doubt that the world in which we awakened on this August day in 2022 is so much different than the world we knew in March of 2020? Here are but a few examples of what has unfolded.

- A global pandemic that shut down our Churches, our schools, our world.
- The indefensible killings of people of color in our country which led to global protests on racial justice and injustice by peoples from all ethnic backgrounds.

- A political system mired in division based on party lines and an abuse of power which has lost its ability to act for the common good of our country and world.
- Uncontrollable gun violence in our nation that has led to mass shootings in our communities, our houses of worship, our schools and our shopping centers that have taken the lives of so many innocent people.
- Continued issues around immigration, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants that strip many of our fellow human beings of their dignity and worth.
- A global climate crisis that continues to grow uncontrollably as wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados, floods and other natural disasters befall us.
- The unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine and its effect on the people of Eastern Europe and of the world.
- The continued focus on child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and beyond that has eroded trust in our ability to serve others with integrity.
- The mistreatment of women in our society who continue to fight for human equality in our male dominated world.

Brothers, these are but some of the ills that affect our world...and in affecting our world, they affect our Church...and in affecting our Church, they affect us. If we are indeed called to be **One in the Mission of Christ**, then addressing these issues and so many more, is not an option. We must be the prophetic voices that our Constitutions and that the Gospel of Jesus call us to be.

CMSM has worked diligently these past three years in order to assist us in addressing the needs facing us as Religious in our world today. We have done so in a variety of ways.

- Our new committee structure has allowed CMSM to operate more effectively and more efficiently. In particular, the Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Committee has provided us with resources

and Action Alerts in responding to the urgent issues I just named. Additionally, the Safeguarding Advisory Committee continues to assist us in our relationship with Praesidium, its Standards for Accreditation and our commitment to providing safe environments for minors and vulnerable adults. Soon, a video series on safeguarding topics will be released by CMSM to assist us further in these efforts.

- Our six CMSM Regions continue to meet locally twice a year, as well as at our Annual Assembly, to discuss those topics pertinent to our lives as Religious. A renewed, expanded and highly collaborative staff at CMSM is always ready to support our efforts in any way they can.
- Our Executive Committee and Board of Directors continue to give of their time and service in ensuring that our Conference – CMSM – is doing all it can to serve the needs of all Members.
- Our Synodality Working Group has offered us valuable insights into the Synod called for by Pope Francis. CMSM has invited us into the Synodal process and given us tools to participate as Regions, as Congregations and within local dioceses and parishes.
- CMSM has embraced the *Laudato Si' Action Platform*, and it has encouraged us to embrace it as well. Nothing less than the health and survival of our planet is at stake if we fail to take steps now to protect our common home.
- The launching of our Post-Pandemic Working Group composed of Religious and lay experts distributed the document: *Supporting Male Religious in a Post-Pandemic Reality: Recommendations for Psychological and Spiritual Health* prepared by Dr. Emily Cash of St. Luke's Institute.
- The relaunching of *Review for Religious* and its accompanying website has provided us with a fresh approach to exploring Religious Life within the challenges and contexts of the contemporary world.
- Eldercare Summits, bringing together Religious and lay people working in this field to discuss best practices and to create a community of practitioners, take place on an annual basis.

- Church collaborations include: LCWR – the Leadership Conference of Women Religious...CMSWR – the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious...numerous Vatican Dicasteries and offices...USCCB - the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops...CRC – the Canadian Religious Conference...CLAR – the Confederation of Latin American and Caribbean Religious...RBC – the Religious Brothers Conference...NRVC – the National Religious Vocation Conference...RFC – the Religious Formation Conference...NRRO - the National Religious Retirement Office...RCRI – the Resource Center for Religious Institutes...and several Catholic treatment centers for Religious. I apologize if I have left anyone out.

These collaborations enrich us and help us to see that truly we are **One in the Mission of Christ** and that together we share the call to **Co-Responsibility in Religious Life**.

- Our Pre-Assembly Workshop on Monday, brought together members of our wider networks, our partners in mission and our colleagues who minister within our **Charismatic Families** and who share **Co-Responsibility** with us. For, they are an integral component of our **Co-Responsibility in Religious Life**.
- Our Post-Assembly Workshop on Friday will focus on bringing together Provincial Councils and Teams from across the continent to be in conversation with one another as together we accept the challenge of **Co-Responsibility in Councils**.

This gathering, here in Buffalo, marks my 18th CMSM Assembly, but my first as President. It has been a privilege for me to serve in this capacity.

During the past two years...first as President-Elect and now as President, I have been grateful for the guidance and mentorship of our past President, Fr. Adam Gonzales...our Executive Director, Fr. Frank Donio...and our outgoing Chief Operating Officer, Tom Southard.

Their hard work and dedication, along with the entire CMSM staff and Board, is the backbone of our Conference. Their behind the scenes work on our behalf allows us to fulfill our roles and responsibilities as Provincial Leaders and as members of Province Leadership Teams.

They provide us with knowledge and insights...with programs and workshops...with webinars and assemblies...that give us the tools we need to serve our Congregations, our Church and our global society.

Let me conclude by going back for a moment to Fr. Benedict Groeschel's advice to me when I was but a twenty year old Novice – "Kevin, always be open to the premise that God writes straight with crooked lines."

Never in my imagination did I dream that I would someday be the Provincial Leader of the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers in both North and Latin America. I was more than content being a high school remedial reading teacher...a baseball and basketball coach...a retreat coordinator and later on, a Director of Initial Formation.

Never in my imagination did I envision that I would be standing before you as President of CMSM. I do so with great humility and only with the strength and support of the Risen Jesus...his blessed Mother, Our Lady of Perpetual Help...my Founder, Blessed Edmund Rice...my fellow Christian Brothers...my fellow Religious...my family and friends...and most especially, the people I have been privileged to serve as a Christian Brother.

So, yes, maybe God does write straight with crooked lines. If only we have the courage to follow God's call daily in our lives, we would see clearly that what we are about as Religious is the notion that we are **One in the Mission of Christ** and that we share together and with so many others **Co-Responsibility in Religious Life**.

God bless each of you, CMSM and all who are inspired by the Gospel of Jesus. May we be worthy servants, acting as **One in the Mission of Christ**.