



7300 Hanover Drive, Suite 304 • Greenbelt, MD 20770 • 301.588.4030 • cmsm.org

Dear Brothers,

It has been exactly one year since we were together in San Antonio. Looking back, things seemed so simple back then, didn't they?

The Assembly was our break, a time for fraternity, friendship, and reflection. Outside of those few days together, many of us were too often on an airplane or in a car as we moved from ministry to ministry and fire to fire. But we embraced that life and the demands and responsibility that comes with leadership.

Then – suddenly - everything changed. In an instant, we were reminded that we ultimately are not in control.

A few weeks ago, I asked you to share with me your reflections on this time. The responses touched me deeply. For many of us, used to being on the run, the forced quiet allowed us to immerse ourselves more fully in prayer and to renew our relationship with Christ, to spend more time with the Blessed Mother and our holy founders, to reflect upon our life as religious and our responsibilities as brothers and leaders during a time of great stress.

We found ourselves focusing more on community life and considering it in new ways. We had to adjust to more common living, while adapting our ministries, or in some cases, losing them completely. A [headline in America magazine](#) last April read, “We are all monks now.” Several Trappist monks were asked what monastic life could teach us about living in quarantine. One of our brothers from Abbey of Gethsemani said simply, “You must return to yourself to find that which transcends yourself, however you name it.”

Perhaps from the pain that we continue to live through, this is the gift: to rediscover and renew our spiritual life -our religious life - and, through that renewal, to become better Religious, brothers and leaders.

CMSM Update

With that in mind, we still do need, however, to plan and serve. A couple of years ago, CMSM began a process of renewal.

- We reorganized our staff structure under the guidance of my predecessor, Fr. Brian Terry.
- By hiring a COO, the Religious executive director would be free, then, to focus on religious life and mission, member support and external relationships. We were blessed to find and hire a qualified layman as our COO, Tom Southard, who now manages program development, staffing, budget, and logistics.

- We have implemented a number of structural changes over the past two years, many on the back end, that are helping CMSM operate more efficiently and cost effectively, while also being able to offer expanded programming and respond to new priorities.
- This past week, the Board approved updated committees and selected an interim executive director, Pallottine Father Frank Donio, who will guide the organization over the next year. As many of you know, our prior director, Fr. Mark Padrez, was called to serve at the Dominican Generalate just before the pandemic. Fr. Mark, as a former Conference President, and then our Executive Director, was in a good place to keep our transition moving ahead. And, now, Fr. Frank will lead us on course with his own unique gifts and experience.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Fr. Frank's provincial, Fr. Peter Sticco, of the Immaculate Conception Province, for releasing him for this important responsibility. I often remind my own brothers that it is a great act of charity, in this day and age, for a congregation to allow a member to serve the greater Church. So, thank you, again, to Fr. Peter and all of the Pallottines.

Fr. Frank will serve part-time, which is a new model for CMSM (we might not have even considered a part-time position before the pandemic hit us). But, I believe this will work for a year. Fr. Frank will continue part-time in the ministry and work of his congregation. This next year will provide an opportunity for us to evaluate this model, which could provide more flexibility for future directors. Even though part-time, as he already has told the staff, he is always available, so do not hesitate to reach out to him.

- A year ago, the National Board disbanded our committees (with the exception of the Finance committee). We realized that CMSM committees are at the heart of member engagement. They help ensure that we are being responsive to our members, guide priorities, examine trends, and provide expertise for our staff. The Board made the commitment to use our committees in a more effective way. And, specifically, a Board member will chair each committee. That will enable better communication between the Board and each of the committees.

After a time of discernment, at last's week board meeting, the board voted on a number of standing committees. The CMSM board's standing committees, going forward, are:

1. Executive Committee, which is composed of board leadership and an at-large board member (Pres, Pres-elect, Vice Pres, Treasurer, an at-large member appointed by the President, and the Executive Director)
2. National Assembly Committee, which will help us plan the theme and speakers for our assembly
3. Finance Committee
4. Formation and Vocation Committee
5. Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Committee
6. Nominating Committee, which is composed of the region chairs, and the
7. Safeguarding Committee, which will take the place of the National Advisory Council

An updated committee list will be posted on the webpage with the standards and other documents we have discussed today. We will also have an open call for our members to submit their names to join these committees. Committee members don't have to be major superiors. So, you may also volunteer your men.

- Another significant piece of the renewal process has been evaluating, updating, and expanding programming to support you and address religious life. To highlight just a few items:
 - **New online community for CMSM members.** Our major superiors are familiar with our listserve, which provides a forum for asking questions and sharing resources and ideas. This fall, we will move to a new system that offers many more benefits, including a resource library with key documents that are members-only, plus forums for all CMSM members, JPIC and safeguarding leaders, and more.
 - **New website.** CMSM will unveil a new website this month. Thank you to all of the communities that provided photos so it truly reflects our membership.
 - **New Leader Workshop.** We were over capacity this past spring and, at the request of members, will offer a fall workshop, provided in a series of monthly online sessions.
 - **Leader conversations.** With the isolation of this year, we want to provide opportunities to get together with other leaders and reflect.

Specifically, on Aug. 20, we will host our first **online leadership conversation** on “theology, leadership, and community in this moment,” with Fr. Dan Horan, Marist Brother Pat McNamara, and Maryknoll Brother Wayne Fitzpatrick.

In October, a **Friday book club** will meet for four sessions – once every two weeks – to explore themes from the Benedictine book, “The Art of Leadership.” Topics include leadership through charism, listening, collaboration in community life, and more. Dr. Susan Timoney of The Catholic University of America School of Theology and Religious Studies will facilitate the conversation. This book is one of the most popular she teaches each year.

- **A refreshed focus on justice and peace.** This was discussed in the staff report earlier. I want to thank everyone who participated in the assessment this spring and look forward to CMSM lifting up and sharing the work of our member institutes and focusing on best practices and resources.
- **Young Religious Initiative.** At our last two assemblies, we invited young religious to be present in small numbers. Our members have asked that we do more. Issues that have come up include intergenerational and cultural understanding, community living, peer support, and readiness to take on ministry leadership roles more quickly than in the past. We have about 50 men meeting online tomorrow with Abbot – now Bishop – Elias Lorenzo and then with each other in small groups as a first step in this new initiative. Fr. Donio will be instrumental in leading this effort.
- **Review for Religious**

We also are looking toward developing an annual program or other opportunities for our collaborators – in finance, fundraising, communications, legal and other related fields – to share and develop best practices and networks of those serving religious ministries.

Issues in Religious Life

One of the primary responsibilities of CMSM is to serve as a collective voice for male religious life and to address collective priorities and concerns. **I want to touch upon three areas: mutual relations, safeguarding, and corporate influence.**

1. As religious we are part of the larger mosaic that forms our Church. As in community, we are at our best when we collaborate for the common good. While many of us enjoy strong relationships with bishops, tensions do arise over sponsorship, safeguarding, handling of pastoral issues, property issues, and so on.

At the local level, we must continue to seek to understand their perspectives and responsibilities, to communicate, and to collaborate as part of our commitment to mutual relations for the good of the Church.

When we know each other, it is easier to understand each other and to find ways to resolve challenges before they spill into headlines.

At the national level, CMSM is committed to representing religious with various offices at the Bishops' Conference. We are especially grateful for the appointment of Bishop Betancourt, who himself is a religious, as our liaison, and for the open collaboration we have with Fr. Luke, Fr. Dan, and the others.

We will continue working with the USCCB and the Holy See to address common and specific issues of concern. Please feel free to reach out to me, Fr. Frank or Tom Southard with your concerns and experiences. While our annual visit to the Holy See was cancelled this year due to the pandemic, it is our hope to meet in person next spring, as usual.

2. I cannot say enough about the importance of **sustained attention and diligence to safeguarding**. At the heart of the issue is our responsibility to protect the most vulnerable among us. No matter how frustrating a civil attorney may be, we must keep in our hearts the people who have been hurt by our brothers in the past and we must be the face of Christ for them in the present and future.

Please also consider that an individual decision may impact other religious, a diocese, and the Church at large, including the faith of the people entrusted to our care. Transparency, a commitment to best practices, and a pastoral heart must guide all that you do in this area. Deacon Steven and the CMSM staff is here to assist you and we will continue to provide education and support safeguarding efforts.

3. Finally, CMSM's purpose, as our statutes note, is to be a support and resource for major superiors, to promote dialogue, and, finally, to provide corporate influence in the Church and in society. As a national organization, CMSM is here to speak as a unified voice for our diverse

charisms, to be prophetic witnesses going to the margins for what is right and to speak against what is wrong, always from the perspective of Catholic male religious leaders and always cognizant of our diverse membership.

We come from many different backgrounds, charisms, cultures. We are contemplatives and active, brothers and fathers. We may be known by our habits, the cross we wear, or the way we care for others. Yet, the thread of our faith, our consecration and our love for our Jesus Christ and the Blessed Mother ties us together in service to our Church and society.

In closing, let's remember that the best way to support each other is to pray for each other.

Thank you.