

“Leadership and charism: Letting the Holy Spirit live and breathe in you and me today.”



Brother Sean Sammon, FMS, Superior General of the Marist Brothers, was one of two keynote speakers at this year's annual Assembly of the United States Conference of Major Superiors of Men. The meeting's theme was Charism and Leadership; Sean delivered a paper entitled: ***“Leadership and charism: Letting the Holy Spirit live and breathe in you and me today.”***

The Assembly brought together more than 225 provincials, abbots, and superiors general for four days in Cleveland, Ohio. Franc Cardinal Rode, Prefect of the Congregation of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, was present throughout and served as celebrant for the final Eucharist. Dominican Sister Donna Markham, OP, Superior General of the Adrian Dominican Sisters congregation and Father Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., former Vicar General of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and a well known author and speaker completed the program.

Sean's address challenged those present to take up a two-fold role in leadership. First of all, to keep before their brothers and lay partners the vision of their founders, and, second, to be loving men who support and encourage their brothers and lay partners but also challenge them when necessary. He warned those present not to be seduced into making the maintenance of institutions a priority, thus losing sight of the dream present when each institution was founded. When making a distinction between corporate, civic, and consensus driven leadership, Sean used the example of Sister of Charity Mary Irene Fitzgibbon, founder of the New York Founding Hospital. He pointed out that she was an effective religious leader because she understood that charism had nothing to do with management and maintenance and everything to do with mission. He went on to say that she responded to the challenge of religious leadership in her day with daring, courage, and ingenuity, and did not concern herself with doing things right, but rather from the very beginning set out to do the right things.

When speaking about renewal, Sean had this to say: ***For revitalization to occur within any District or Province, though, transformation must go beyond the personal; it must penetrate and reshape the entire fabric of the group. A critical step in the process of revitalization will occur when those who have experienced profound personal change begin to come together in a network where their experience can be shared, sustained, enhanced.***

Among other topics covered were the following: spiritual indifference, those

foundational elements that lie at the heart of religious life, and the need for faith and a spirit of risk. Now is the time, he said for the experimentation recommended by Vatican Council II to begin. Genuine experimentation that leads to self-realization through self-transcendence. In bringing his address to a close, Sean made these remarks : ***If religious life is to be what it should be: the Church's living memory of what it can and must be, then we will have to make the changes necessary to ensure that it is just that. For one hundred years from now, someone will write the history of this period of religious life. What will they say about you and me? That like Mary Irene Fitzgibbon we responded to the signs of our times with courage, daring, ingenuity. Will they be able to cite acts of heroism such as those displayed by Mary Lynch and Juliana Nolan as they came ashore in old age in the west of Ireland to refound Dominican life in that country once again? Or will they say we played it safe, maintained the status quo, traded for security and respectability the spirit of sacrifice and daring that has always be at the heart of religious life. The choice is really up to us.***

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