

SSS Grapevine

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Men Religious Superiors Meet in Phoenix, Arizona

Recap by John Thomas Lane SSS, Provincial Superior



The 70th annual meeting of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) was held in Phoenix, Arizona, July 20 – 23, 2026. The theme of the national assembly was “One in Christ: Communal Life Today.” There are 230 religious institutes of men in the United States, of which 159 are represented at this meeting. For the second time in CMSM’s history, 25 young religious joined a leadership training workshop. Then they participated in the assembly,

adding a hope-filled dimension with their enthusiasm to serve the future of our religious communities. Next year, Father Joseph Kiet Nguyen SSS, applied and was accepted into this special cohort beginning in September 2026.

The agenda was typical for many religious assembly events: Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharist, prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, wonderful meals, and camaraderie among the men. Twelve of the provincials who are part of the Catholic Theological Union (CTU) had a special luncheon together, and a few of my classmates are now provincials and joined the event.

With the theme of community life, the presentations and homilies focused on particular aspects. For the first time, the newly appointed (March 7, 2026) apostolic nuncio of the United States, Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, attended and brought a special written message from Pope Leo XIV, a former member of CMSM as a provincial of the Midwest Augustinians. (The full text is included at the end of the *Grapevine*.) He is quite down-to-earth and was delightful in his presentation and humor.



Myself pictured with
Archbishop Gabriele Caccia



Bishop John P. Dolan

Bishop John P. Dolan, 5th bishop of the Diocese of Phoenix, welcomed us graciously, and his presence was appreciated each day during the conference. He highlighted that Phoenix is now the second-largest diocese, with 2 million Catholics, and the fifth-largest city in the USA. Not only did he give a poignant homily at one of the Masses, but he also addressed the assembly on the “Mental Health Needs of Ministers.” The bishop’s gift was sharing his grief, having lost so many in his family to mental illness and suicide. He focused on this aspect of religious life that needs our constant care for our brothers in their needs and the basic aspect of checking in with one another regularly.

Deacon Steve DeMartino gave an address reviewing points on Adult Misconduct: Best Practices in Prevention, Protection and Response. This is considered the new frontier of safeguarding ministry and is now at a point of making separate policies. We SSS, too, have focused for many years on safeguarding ministry for children and vulnerable adults. This charge, since 2002 with the

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on the crimes against young people, has now evolved, with the CMSM leadership looking into this and providing a draft policy for our Review Boards to examine at other issues of other community life.

Benedictine Brother John Mark Kalkenhain from Saint Meinrad Abbey reported on his study and that of the Center for Applied Research of the Apostolate (CARA) for the “Support & Accountability as Keys to Healthy & Resilient Communities” address. He wrote and commented on his book, *How We Love: A Formation for a Celibate Life- Mental Health and Mental Illness*. Our principles: prevent, protect, and respond, for we are to be mutually supporting one another, and we should never wait to reach out to our brothers [and sisters] in community and in the world.



A special luncheon together with a few classmates of mine who are now provincials and joined the event.

Delaware-based Norbertine Father James Herring, and the president of CMSM, gave a presidential address on “Gospel Communities – of Religious Life – and Living our Eucharistic Calling.” While listening to him, I could not help but hear echoes of our *Rule of Life* and *Project of Life* as we learn to love with the lens of the Eucharist and the heart of Christ. Given that this year our country consecrated itself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, Herring emphasized that we as religious (and aggregation members) are called to have our hearts grow into the Sacred Heart, be in union with Christ, witness that heart of Christ to others, and bring about moments of justice and fidelity to ensure the gospel of love in our world. Being a noted African-American speaker, Herring stressed the need for Christ’s heart to cure the “-isms” of our world, starting with racism.

Father Herring also mentioned the concerns and challenges that “keep us awake at night,” causing much stress on our religious life:

- the technological isolationism – where we prefer time with a screen that leads to loneliness with this device
- parish challenges
- isolated in our struggles and not sharing them

Nationally, we reviewed our retention of young religious, the vocational challenges, and how we are each called to be better listeners before we speak and share. He stated:



Holy Spirit & Crosier provincials
in a free moment

We, provincials, are to worry over the souls of our brothers and to make sure that they do not see us pushing them, but loving them, because we see that together we need to self-enter, cultivate communion, and build up the Body of Christ together. We are to be one in Christ, like when in the Upper Room at Pentecost, the community gathered. [When we gather for community time, at prayer or meals,] we are being faithful then to a Pentecost moment, to be one together in the Cenacle. We come from a fractured world to be broken men, blessed and shared to minister in a broken world. To be Eucharist that cares from the broken wheat [and crushed grapes] to be alive in Eucharistic ways and life.

We are to show the world a miracle: Christ is real – and that real presence breaks down the dividing walls of human hostility to be living signs of the kingdom of God. We are called to hear others say about us, “See how they love one another.” This is the best marketing campaign for religious life.

The Holy Spirit is not in retirement! Let us continue to be alive in the Holy Spirit to build up the bonds of our community, our common life [and for us, as members of the Eymardian family.] May God heal our fractures and make us one in Christ for the life of the world.

Another presentation was actually a panel discussion on “Intergenerational Community Life & Leadership – A Study.” This led to many of us in our table discussion sharing our own experiences now with internationality of religious communities and our young religious gaining the wisdom of the elders of our religious communities. Our last presentation focused on animating our local communities and supporting best practices for being faithful witnesses to our charism.

There were a few more talks that I attended, such as on improving your “Review Boards” and canon law support. However, I have highlighted key aspects that were outstanding and formational. This assembly and the message of Pope Leo are quite helpful as last-minute preparation for our Province of Saint Ann Provincial Chapter 27. We pray that these reflections above will assist us in working together to build our future and community life: “One in Christ.”

Letter of the Holy Father Leo XIV on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of CMSM in the USA

To the Very Reverend Frank Donio SAC, Executive Director, CMSM (and fellow religious):



I was pleased to be informed that the Conference of Major Superiors of Men is celebrating its seventieth anniversary during the 2026 National Assembly, taking place in Phoenix, Arizona, and I send cordial good wishes to all taking part.

As you mark seven decades of fostering collaboration among male religious in the United States of America, it is an appropriate time to give thanks to God for the graces received during these years. In your efforts to provide a space for dialogue and to support the leadership of your member communities, you have helped to reinforce the public witness of consecrated men who devote their lives to the service of the Gospel.

In reflecting on the theme for this year's gathering, "One in Christ: Communal Life Today," I would encourage you to consider community life "as a place of sanctification and a source of inspiration, witness and strength in your apostolate" (**Address to Four Religious Institutes**, 18 September 2025). Indeed, it is precisely through sharing everything in common, including material goods, spiritual experiences, apostolic ideals and charitable service, that the hidden presence of the risen Lord is made manifest among you (confer Saint John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation **Vita Consecrata** 42). I trust that these days of reflection, dialogue and prayer will allow you to discern ways to deepen fraternal communion both within and among your Institutes, and, in this way, enable you to continue offering a united, joyful and authentic witness to Christ in the various communities and apostolates where you serve.



Father Frank,
Executive Director of CMSM

With these sentiments, I assure you of my spiritual closeness and entrust the National Assembly to the loving intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. To all present I impart my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to all in the Congregations which you represent.

From the Vatican, 16 July 2026.