The Mountaineer

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From the President's Desk

Dear Friends,

As you know, beginning last year in anticipation for the Jubilee Year, the Church has been focusing on the virtue of hope, asking all men and women to be praying, thinking and perhaps acting with this particular focus in our lives as consecrated persons--pilgrims of hope on the path to peace.

What is hope? And do we cultivate this theological virtue, living in

Confident Expectation: a firm belief and certainty in God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises, which is…

Rooted in Christ and His Resurrection: the ultimate evidence for our hope. Do we…

Focus on God's Promises: with an unwavering confidence in God's word and His ultimate plan for eternal life with Him. And do we cultivate hope as…

A Source of Strength: this firm assurance provides courage to face life's challenges, resist temptation, and overcome setbacks.

How we as consecrated seculars have practiced this virtue as individuals and institutes has been the subject of our annual conferences, the subcommittee of the bishops' conferences, and in the recesses of our hearts.

And we ask ourselves: do our daily lives reflect this hope, this peaceful and confident path we are on to each person we encounter so as to draw them onto this path? Does our gratitude for life and the source of life in the Eucharist reveal itself to others even without their knowing it? We hope so!

Sue Larkin



Delegates at National Gathering

Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love! *-Romans 8:35*

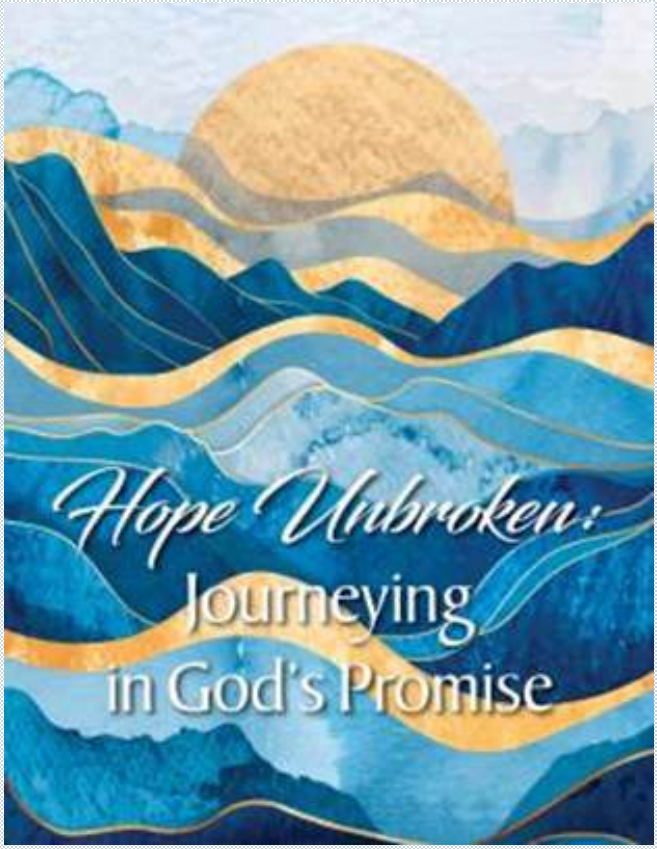
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Hope Unbroken: Journeying in God's Promise -*Susan Larkin*

These three articles highlight Holy Year of HOPE Events where secular institute members could bring our Unique charism into wider circles of society. From the five pillars of Consecrated Life gifted to the Church, we are called to be true Mountaineers of the Spirit!

I had the good fortune to be invited to attend the Leadership Conference of Women Religious held from August 12th to August 15th in Atlanta, Georgia. The theme of "Hope Unbroken: Journeying in God's Promise" drew approximately 900 members and collaborators. Throughout the event, participants acknowledged the struggle of these times and explored the practices that can ground them in faith so they can live "hope unbroken" for the sake of the world, the church, and their religious communities.



The opening of the assembly included a recorded greeting from the US apostolic nuncio, Cardinal Christophe Pierre; as well as in-person greetings from Sister Simona Brambilla, MC and Daniela Leggio, from the Vatican; Bishop William Wack, CSC, LCWR's episcopal liaison; and Archbishop Gregory John Hartmayer, OFM Conv from the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

In a moving personal reflection that stemmed from the experience of being diagnosed with cancer shortly after assuming her role as LCWR president Sister Kathy Brazda, CSJ of LaGrange, Illinois shared in an address the questions she carried: "How could I lead when I had doubts about my own future, my own life, my own ability to be competent? How could I plan for a future that I had doubts would be available to me?" In her address, she recounted what she had learned about leadership for these times from the stance of greater vulnerability. "In surrendering to God's strength, we can come to courage and grace and the dynamism of love. With that encouragement, we can face the future through the best and worst of times."

Sister Simona Brambilla, MC, prefect of the Dicastery for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome, addressed how religious life can be a sign of hope today. She noted, "May consecrated life truly always be a humble prophecy of forgiveness, of reparation, of the rebuilding of bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood, of peace, of trust, of communion. May it be a sentinel with senses sharpened and open to perceive in the night the breath of God, His gentle light, His whisper, His fragrance, His unmistakable taste, in order to welcome it, point it out, proclaim it, and walk the paths of hope that does not disappoint, because they are rooted in the Paschal Mystery, in the Heart of God."

Rev. James Martin, SJ, editor-at-large at America Media, used the gospel story of the raising of Lazarus and challenged the participants to apply the insights of this story to the realities of US religious life today. He posed the questions: "What is keeping us from hearing God's voice in our lives, in our congregations, in our communities?" "What do you, what do we, need to leave behind to hear God calling us into a sur-

USCSI is invited to LCWR Convention 2025

prising new life?" Father Martin emphasized the personal relationships with Jesus of Martha, Mary and Lazarus and emphasized our need to bring Jesus into our lives, concerns, uncertainties and to trust in the future which God has in store for us.



Throughout the conference, I met members of religious communities and vicars for religious from various dioceses whom I knew from the past several years.

We talked about secular institutes and our similarities (and differences) in the problems associated with declining numbers of vocations and the need for prayer and work and of course hope in the providence of God. It was a prayerful, stimulating and challenging conference and I am grateful for the opportunity to have gone.



Sister Mary Bendyna OP and Sue Larkin



Anne Elizabeth Giuliani, Vicar for Religious for The Archdiocese of Washington, DC, is a member of the Notre Dame de Vie Secular Institute

Heather Triggs, DeSales Institute is from Atlanta: I was able to attend one of the three days (work schedule didn't permit more, because of unforeseen complications - though my very kind boss had given me all three days off). The day I spent was incredibly beautiful. Over 900 consecrated women in one space - and we were treated to listening to Sister Simona Brambilla from the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life. It was amazing. The whole theme (so timely) was hope; our hope in God. We had some very lovely table discussions, and I shared our form of consecrated life with them.

Bishop Wack from Pensacola/Tallahassee was the celebrant for Mass that day; he is just a joy. I had the opportunity of meeting and conversing with him a couple of years ago at the Steubenville Conference in Atlanta; he is just lovely.

I hope all is well - we are off to a new year in school; I have a kindergartener who is struggling each day just to get into the classroom. Lots of tears and fears...lots of prayers on my end.

~ Come and Join Us at our National Gathering in Maryland ~

Composed by Marcia Vinje, Schoenstatt Sister of Mary, who faithfully lends her talent for an annual report:

The 2025 Annual National Gathering of USCSI opened on Friday, September 26, at the Bon Secours Retreat center in Marriottsville, Maryland. At 7:00 pm President Sue Larkin welcomed the participants, in person and online. The main celebrant for Holy Mass was Vice-president Father John O'Neill, with Deacon Paul Lang assisting. Following, each member introduced him/herself. The rest of the evening was free, although some people remained to do business or networking.







On Saturday, September 27 the day began with Morning Prayer and Mass in the chapel. **Father Jorge Torres**, Executive Director of the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, was the main celebrant and homilist. He encouraged us to have hope and patience with the Church when she does not understand our vocation.

At 10:30 am Father Torres gave us the main presentation titled **"Hope of our Secular Institutes with a Future Vison."** He first assured us that the bishops are very grateful for our commitment to our vocation, although it takes time for them to understand it. Referencing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and ***Vita Consecrata***, Father Torres unfolded the importance of our vocation and its rich legacy for the Church. The desire for the kingdom is our happiness, and it involves our relationship with God; namely, a choice to trust him. We can be in darkness and still trust in the light. How do we accompany those who do suffer this darkness?

Father Torres invited us to ask ourselves who the lights of our life are who give us hope? **Be grateful for your vocation and the community of your institute.** Using the example of Jan Tyranowski, a Polish youth minister who mentored the future Pope John Paul II, pointed out that people we mentor might change the world. He encouraged us to simply enjoy our charism and find God in the ordinary daily life, in our routine. Unite with Jesus in his hidden life. Rest in Jesus and let him take on the responsibility that it is His; do not usurp it.

How do you live your vocation in the spirit of hope?

Again, read and join in our panel discussion—this is your Jubilee Holy Year!



After a dinner, time for prayer, confession, and meeting with institute members, we gathered at 3:30 pm for a **panel discussion**. Members were Father Tom Crangle, Father Tom Franks, OFM Cap, Eileen Johannsen, Cathy McDonnell, and Kathy Tierney. The topic of discussion was: How you Live Your Vocation in the Spirit of Hope. After the presentations, there was a lively discussion which included our online guests. At 5:30 we gathered for our annual photo outside near the beautiful pond.

After supper we prayed night prayer and watched a documentary **about Saint Carlo Acutis**. After the official program ended, a number of participants continued the discussion and engaged in networking.

Sunday, September 28 opened with Morning Prayer and Mass, celebrated by Father Scott Jones. At 10:30 the business meeting was opened with a prayer to the Holy Spirit. **Kathy Tierney was elected as our new Vice-President and Cathy Mc Donnell as the Councillor.** Father Scott Jones shared about **the Inter-institute Formation Classes** that were held online this past year, led by Father O'Neill. There were 25 to 30 participants each time they met.



The Jubilee of Consecrated Life for the Year of Hope will take place in Rome October 8-9, 2025. Father Scott Jones and Ada Locatelli will represent USCSI. October 10-12 the Dicastery of Consecrated Life will host a gathering, and Sue Larkin will join our representatives for that occasion.

Our next dates to post on your new **2026** calendars are: Annual Zoom Meeting morning of Saturday, March 14th and the National Meeting in St Louis, Missouri, from September 11-13, 2026.









Hope of our Secular Institutes with a Future Vision — Father Jorge Torres



Fr. Jorge Torres, Executive Director of the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations for the USCCB, gave a presentation on Hope that does not disappoint on the morning of September 27, 2025.

By way of introduction, Fr. Torres was raised in Brooklyn, NY. On behalf of all the Bishops, he shared a "Thank you," with an exhortation, "Go out and be with the people!"

Fr. Torres quoted Pope Francis, "We all know what Hope is." It involves our relationship with God, our desire to be with Him in this world and forever. It is our choice to trust and rely on Him. We will go through challenging times… To this point he cited the life of Venerable Jan Tyranowski, a single man living in Krakow, suffering from chronic abdominal ailments, heard the homily of a Salesian priest who said, "It is not difficult to become a saint." This had a profound impact on Jan's life and forever changed his way of thinking and desire for personal holiness. Jan became an ardent devotee of St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila. A Salesian priest asked Jan if he would lead a religious group of men. Jan accepted this role and formed groups of young men and called them the Living Rosary Groups. A young Karol Wotyla joined one of Jan's groups, and Jan introduced St. John of the Cross to Karol Wotyla.

Pope St. John Paul II later credited Jan with causing him to recognize his vocation and reject an acting career. He wrote of his mentor, "*He was one of those unknown saints, hidden amid the others like a marvelous light at the bottom of life, at a depth where night usually reigns. He disclosed to me the riches of his inner life, of his mystical life. In his words, in his spirituality, and in the example of a life given to God alone, he represented a new world that I did not yet know. I saw the beauty of a soul opened up by grace*."

Fr. Torres, went on to say, "We have an epidemic of loneliness with questions like, Where do I belong? Who am I?" Fr. Torres asked us, "Who are the John Paul IIs in my life?"

Jan took on a more fraternal role. He cited a Jewish Proverb: He who changes another's heart, changes the world. Often those who are fighting the reality of a vocation do not know they have one. Love them. We must strive to transform the world from within by the power of the beatitudes. Go there with Jesus. Use the beatitudes for an examination of conscience. Are you willing to find God in the ordinariness of life?

It baffles the mind, Jesus spent 30 years in His hidden life and only 3 years lived publicly. All we know about those years is when he was lost in the Temple and Mary & Joseph found him. In our consecration, we are set aside for everyone else. We unite ourselves with Jesus in His hidden life. How often do you relish your charism? Where is God hidden in my routine?

Fr. Torres went on to present the Letter of Pope Francis to the President of the World Conference of Secular Institutes from February 2, 2022:

"A great challenge concerns the relationship between secularity and consecration, aspects which you are called to hold together. Indeed, because of your consecration it is easy to assimilate you to religious, but I would like your initial prophecy, particularly the baptismal character which marks secular lay institutes, to characterize you. Be inspired, dear members of secular institutes, by the desire to live a "holy secularity," because you are a lay institution. You are one of the oldest charisms and the Church will always need you. But your consecration must not be confused with religious life. It is a baptism that constitutes the first and most radical form of consecration."

In addition, Fr. Torres encouraged us not to be afraid to cry out to Jesus as St. John of the Cross did, "Save me from myself." Don't be afraid to cry with Jesus. To be with Him in His sorrow. Consolation is to be with God. Be involved in the world. Jesus Is Our Hope.

In closing, Fr. Torres shared how we as a Church are working up to 2033 and the 2000 year celebration of Jesus' resurrection. We are also looking forward to celebrating the 500 year memorial of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 2031! He also hinted there could be another Eucharistic Congress in 2029.

*Thank you, **Cathy McDonnell**, for your efforts to share with our readership. Cathy was elected as our Councillor, starting her 1st three-year term on September 28, 2025. Belonging to the Apostolic Oblates. she is recently retired and lives in Stanton, CA.*

Take Time to Read and Continue YOUR list of Living Hope for Others

Here is a sampling of responses from several members of the USCSI for Bishop Beyrouti's subcommittee on the jubilee to the following questions:

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, how are we living as pilgrims of hope in today's world? How are we encouraging those we serve to also live as pilgrims of hope?

1. **Strengthening incipient vocations**: USCSI initiated a conference-wide Zoom series which met 4 times last year for all those in formation from all institutes in the United States. It was organized by one of our group leaders and another member gave a reflection on one of the aspects of consecrated life. It was a success and will be continued this year.

2. **Continued Attendance at SEEK Conferences:** to spread the word about secular institutes. The conference will be represented by members of various institutes in Columbus, Ohio, and Fort Worth, Texas, on January 1st-5th, 2026. The SEEK conference draws thousands of college-aged students for 5 days of prayer, talks, exhibits and fellowship.
3. **Attendance by Representatives of the USCSI at Various Conferences:** Members of the USCSI attended the LCWR conference and will attend the NCVR next year to promote knowledge and understanding of secular institutes.
4. **Publication in Review for Religious**: "Armida Barelli: Channel of Education and Consecration," an article about the history of the Foundress of the Secular Institute of Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ who was instrumental in Church recognition of the state of lay consecration by Pope Pius XII, was published in the Arts and Essays section of the Review for Religious journal.
5. **Giving Hope in the Midst of Darkness:** We are the Lumen Gentium of consecrated life in the Church. Whenever someone contacts us (USCSI) for information, we give them hope that they can play a role in scattering the darkness around them. Secular institutes see the world as the place where salvation history plays out and where souls are won for the Lord.
6. **Letters:** An 80-year-old member decided to answer every single Petition Request or Donation Note received at the Schoenstatt Marian Shrine on the Texan Gulf during this Jubilee Year of Hope. As a designated Holy Year Site, she patiently explains the graces of the Jubilee for all who visit the Shrine and writes a personal answer to them. Many are touched because hers is one of the few US postal stamped letters that they receive. The number of letters will surpass 1,000.
7. **Monthly Holy Year Pilgrimage Retreat Days:** This member decided to offer monthly Holy Year Pilgrimage Retreat Days. Coupling with a retired priest and reaching out to area parish priests, the days have been greatly cherished by many attendees. They start at 10 am with a Talk, Confession, Holy Mass, Lunch, and Adoration Hour with Benediction at 3 pm. Many have commented on how these days have enriched their lives.
8.

9.

10.

USCSI: PILGRIMS OF HOPE ON THE PATH TO PEACE: OCTOBER - ROMA



The Jubilee for Consecrated Life took place in Rome from October 8th through October 12th, 2025. Representing the USCSI were Father Scott Jones, of the Institute of the Heart of Jesus, Ada Locatelli, of the Society of Maximilian Kolbe, and me. Also attending was Prachi Shah, a consecrated woman in the Cistercian tradition looking to found a secular institute.

The pilgrimage began with going through the Holy Door on Wednesday afternoon, October 8th, followed by a vigil of prayer in St. Peter's Basilica, open to all members in consecrated life. Thursday morning a Mass was offered in St. Peter's Square celebrated by Pope Leo XIV. He gave a compelling homily on the importance of the witness of God's love and making God's love present in the world, naming each group of consecrated life by name. Over the four days, there were meetings of all members of consecrated life in the mornings as well as afternoon meetings of groups, meeting by type (religious institutes, contemplative institutes, secular institutes, consecrated virgins, etc).

Our session for secular institutes was chaired by Barbara Pandolfi, president of CMIS (as well as president of my own institute). She used the image of the seed which, in order to grow, is buried beyond view and is almost said to be smothered; however, when watered, it begins to emerge and, like the yeast in dough, changes its medium. We in secular institutes are sown in the world and, through poverty, chastity, and obedience, will be signs of hope to the hopeless through our witness of Christ's love.

Barbara's remarks were followed by "Listening in the Spirit" where small groups of us meditated on questions. After the first session, we changed groups and then shared our reflections on the questions. This was a very effective way of listening without commentary to each person's meditation.

On Friday and Saturday morning, the thousands of us present in Rome met together in a large hall right next to the Vatican where we had the Holy Mass, a speaker, and a music and dance program with religious and dramatic theme (very beautiful and moving). On the second day, Pope Leo XIV came to our meeting. He was, of course, received with cheers from the audience. He addressed the group offering his thanks for the witness of their vocations in following the evangelical counsels.

The final session on the 11th was held in the evening at the Church of St. Paul Outside the Walls. Participants would tell you that they experienced moments of great joy in the witness borne by seeing the numbers of people who have offered their lives completely to the Lord and who live through their evangelical counsels. As one speaker said, "We are people of hope, waiting for someone to come who has already come and who, by his coming, has already given us witness of his love for us and for the world." Many of us left Rome tired but replenished and renewed in the presence of our sisters and brothers from every corner of the world who had come to offer thanks in this Jubilee Year for Consecrated Life. *-Sue Larkin*



let those who can grasp it, grasp it—exclaims the Savior













More pictures and inspirations from this Jubilee for Consecrated Life will be shared in the Winter Mountaineer

Cardinal Ángel F. Artime, S.D.B., Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

Dear Consecrated Brothers and Sisters,
We are here together as pilgrims of hope, men and women called to testify that peace is not a distant dream, but a path to be traveled every day, step by step, with our hearts turned to the Lord.

The pilgrim does not own the land he walks on, but inhabits it with respect and gratitude. Likewise, we, consecrated people, live in the world without belonging to it, carrying in our hearts the certainty that God walks with us.
Our life is a sign of a journey that tends toward a greater goal: the Kingdom of love and peace that Christ inaugurated with his Passover.



On this journey of ours, the figure of Mary guides and enlightens us. The Gospel of Luke tells us that "Mary set out and went into the hill country and came with haste to a city of Judah." It is an image of an interior and exterior pilgrimage: Mary carries within herself the hope of the world, and turns it into encounter, closeness, service. She does not remain still, she does not close herself off in her own grace, but becomes a messenger of joy and peace.

Thus we, too, like her, are called to set out on a journey. **Consecrated life is a pilgrimage of availability:** reaching out to others, bringing the presence of Christ who dwells within us, making the joy of the Gospel resonate in places where hope is fragile. Mary does not bring words, but a presence that stirs life. Elizabeth, in her womb and in her heart, recognizes the peace that comes from God. Thus we too are sent as peacemakers: not through grand gestures, but with tenderness, listening, and daily fidelity that generate communion and rekindle hope.

Being pilgrims of hope on the paths of peace means walking with a humble step, bringing light where there is darkness, and preserving the peace within ourselves so we can give it to others. Mary is the icon of this mission: a woman on a journey, a bearer of Christ, a witness to a God who comes to meet us, who visits his people, who opens paths of reconciliation and joy.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask the Virgin of the Visitation to also accompany our journey as consecrated men and women. May she teach us to go "with haste," like her, toward every place where life awaits a sign of goodness; may she make us pilgrims of hope, bearers of peace, servants of joy, so that every encounter may also become for us a small Visitation, a fragment of the Gospel lived. We ask this of the Lord with this prayer that I pronounce on behalf of all of us:

Lord Jesus,
You who filled the heart of Mary, your Mother, with the joy of your presence, grant us to walk, like her, on the paths of hope. May our communities be places of encounter and listening, where peace is built in silence, service, and fraternity.
Teach us to move "with haste," not out of anxiety, but out of love, to bring Your light where weariness reigns, to revive those who have lost faith.

Make us, O Lord, pilgrims of hope and peacemakers,
witnesses of Your tenderness in the world,
and grant that, like Mary and Elizabeth,
we may recognize You in every encounter,
bless Your presence, and praise You with joy. Amen.

-Contributed by Prachi Shah

More of our cherished members have entered Eternal Rest

Elizabeth Kirkland Rockwood Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate

Betse died peacefully in San Antonio, Texas, on June 26, 2025, after suffering from Alzheimer's Disease. Born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania on May 18, 1937, Betse grew up riding horses in the still-rural suburbs of Philadelphia and became a decorated equestrian. She found in the outdoors the presence of the Divine and a call to serve, which stayed with her throughout her life.

Betse followed two paths into adulthood: she entered the Lankenau School of Nursing, but her studies were cut short when she met the love of her life – Bill Rockwood – at a July 4th celebration. Betse and Bill married a few months later, a union that continued for 46 years until Bill's death in 2002.

Betse established their home in Texas and set about encouraging the world around her to realize its capacity for love. While raising three children, she published two books on Christian prayer that had multiple printings in multiple languages. Betse also led as a layperson in the Episcopal Church for decades, including a term as President of the Women of Christ Church in San Antonio.

At the age of 76, Betse graduated from the Oblate School of Theology with two degrees in Pastoral Ministry. Betse was then received into consecrated life with the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, continuing to live and work in the world as Christ's committed servant. Betse had given a presentation at the USCSI annual conference in Arizona.

Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

Antoinette Buffler Schoenstatt Sister of Mary

Antoinette returned home to the Father on October 13, 2025. Despite having suffered from dementia for more than a decade, her cheerful and fun-loving personality brought constant joy to others.

Antoinette was born on February 16, 1938, in Ausnang, in the Alps of Germany. She knew the art of yodeling and up until a few weeks before she died, Antoinette used her own characteristic yodel at random moments to bring a smile to everyone's face.

After finishing school, she learned about Schoenstatt and felt called not only for the movement but also for missionary work. Antoinette joined the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary in February 1957.

On October 7, 1958, Antoinette and five other members of the institute set sail across the Atlantic Ocean bound for Texas, USA. After first honing her English skills, Antoinette took up the task of kindergarten and primary teacher and later she worked in the kitchen at Refugio Hospital. She finished her Bachelor's degree in Theology at Incarnate Word College in San Antonio, in 1989. Antoinette had a markedly kind personality. She was attentive to the needs of others and served them generously. She was able to educate, but always with understanding and motherly love.

In 1991 Antoinette was appointed area leader of the institute in Texas. After 12 years she served on the area council. When Hurricane Harvey ravaged our Schoenstatt Center in Texas, Antoinette moved to the institute headquarters in Waukesha, Wisconsin. Her deeply religious spirit remained outwardly visible – she loved to visit the Marian shrine and cemetery often, hold adoration, and pray the rosary. She often spoke her beautiful, pious thoughts out loud to the delight of her listeners. One sensed – as was the case throughout her life – that she really prayed genuinely and was totally given to God.

- **USCSI Mission Statement:**
  - The USCSI shares in the mission of Jesus Christ in serving its member institutes by providing education, resources, and support for member institutes.
  - The USCSI is an organization of member institutes committed to making known, understood, and appreciated the call to consecrated secularity in the Catholic Church.
  - The USCSI collaborates with other groups to present consecrated secularity as a viable option in today's Church.

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- **Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwrsN2t7T8xHfrdyGCHY59g**
  Websites: www.secularinstitutes.org & www.cmis-int.org/en/
  Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/secular_institutes_usa/
  Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/secularinstitutes

- Contributions and photos for our Winter **Mountaineer** are due by December 5, 2025 to jessica@schsrsmary.org

BLESSED THANKSGIVING TO ALL

Lord Jesus, forgive me for not saying "Thank You."
I repent of focusing on the things I don't have,
instead of the blessings You have given me.
I want to be like the one who returned to express
deepest gratitude, awe, and praise.
Thank You for saving me, forgiving me and
providing for my needs each day. Amen.

Happy 250th Anniversary Year to America!  250 thanksgiving Litanies to God!