The Mountaineer

United States Conference of Secular Institutes

Fall 2026 – Volume 19, Issue 3

From the President's Desk

Dear Friends,

This summer '26 brought an embarrassment of riches: my institute's retreat in San Damiano, California, followed by the CMIS Congress and Assembly in Madrid, and finally the USCSI annual conference at the Augustine Institute in St Louis, Missouri, September 11-13.

The annual conference, Friday evening to Sunday noon, packed in a tremendous amount of learning, camaraderie, and (hopefully) graces in prayer, spending time with other members, and enjoying the beauty and hospitality of the Augustine Institute. Mega thanks to our guest speaker, Fr. Jerry Stookey OP, who challenged and involved us in his seminar on peace and its many dimensions.

Father Scott Jones celebrated Mass on Friday, Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski of St Louis celebrated Mass on Saturday morning, and our ever faithful and energetic episcopal moderator Archbishop Mark Rivituso arriving early Saturday, celebrated Mass on Sunday. Their presence and compelling homilies gave great witness of the Church to our vocation of consecrated secularity.

Reports were given and elections were conducted on Sunday. Deacon Paul reported that he was not seeking reelection, having served since 2019 in the role of treasurer. We expressed great gratitude for his service. Beth Schwartz, of the Institute of the Heart of Jesus, was elected treasurer, and Jessica Swedzinski was re-elected Secretary. Kathy Tierney, Cathy McDonnell and I continue to serve.

Father Scott Jones spoke about the third year of the Zoom series for those in formation The series will be open to all members. Thank you to those members who came in person and on Zoom. **We encourage you to think about attending in person, if possible, next September 17-19 2027, at Marytown/Maximilian Kolbe Shrine in Libertyville, Illinois. Being there is worth the wear and tear! Also, we are looking to underwrite some expenses for those who need it.**

Thanks be to God,
Sue



Peace Be With You! Fr. Jerry Stookey, OP, chats with Emily Donaire and Jane Akelo Dominic, members of the Caritas Christi Institute.

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CMIS Congress and Assembly
August 17-23, 2026
Madrid, Spain



From August 17th to the 23rd, 2026, Kathy Tierney representing the Institute of St. Francis de Sales and Sue Larkin representing the USCSI attended the 2026 World Congress and Assembly of CMIS in Madrid, Spain.

One hundred and eighty-three institutes were represented at the Congress. All gathered throughout the week for prayer, for reflection together in language groups, to hear reports from the outgoing Council, and to hear an address from Sister Simone Brambilla, the Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on "Seeds and Yeast" and the importance of "living within."

The small language groups provided not only the opportunity to reflect with different sisters and brothers in secular institutes sharing the same language, but to get to know these people at a closer range than simply members of a large audience.

On Thursday, four buses headed out of Madrid for a day in Avila to visit in the footsteps of St. Teresa of Avila. The bishop of Avila celebrated Mass at the Cathedral and members were taken in tours by language groups to visit the church where she was born, the convent where she had lived for 27 years, and other noteworthy places.

Saturday morning brought the voting of delegates for the next mandate and Barbara Pandolfi was elected President. The final action was to have language groups meet to recommend directions for the goals for the next four years.

The Assembly concluded with Mass, offering grateful thanks to the Lord for a successful meeting and an opportunity to pray and reflect with one another. -*Sue Larkin*





CMIS Outing Day to St. Teresa of Ávila









11. Being a pilgrim means accepting precariousness with eyes fixed on the Absolute... Susan Larkin – United States Conference of Secular Institutes – USCSI

Sue (along with 10 others) was asked to give a reflection at the CMIS Assembly in Madrid and the following is the full text of her reflection:

I first heard the word *pilgrim* as a child when studying the settling of the United States by the "pilgrims" from several European countries (principally England) in an effort to find a place where they could practice their religion freely.

Being a pilgrim suggests precariousness and a state of uncertainty, risk and vulnerability. As people in transit between one place and another, all humans are pilgrims in this journey of life from conception until death. However, as baptized persons, we are pilgrims with the sustaining power of sanctifying grace; as with the eyes of faith and feet of hope, we travel our journey from God back to God, as earned by the death and resurrection of His divine Son.

We will encounter rocky roads, opposition, our own sinfulness and lethargy, but as members of secular institutes we are supported by the guideposts of our vows or promises of poverty, chastity and obedience after the graces all who are baptized receive at baptism.

As consecrated persons in secular institutes, we do not wear a pilgrim's symbols: no habit, no collar, not even a scallop shell. We must be robed with the light of Christ step by step, day by day, to light the path to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for ourselves and others.

But we cannot simply be immersed in our own precarious state. We must attend to our neighbors who are often living a more precarious life than our own. The needs of the poor, of immigrants, all wayfarers on this road must be seen and assisted as fellow travelers in their human as well as spiritual needs. In our generosity to others, having our eyes fixed on the mercy of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is to let His mercy to us shine through in our labors for others.

I cannot help but think about Blessed Armida Barelli, the founder of my own institute (along with Agostino Gemelli, OFM), and her fierce devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Not only did she work to have the Italian army dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but she insisted on keeping in the title Catholic University of Milan *of the Sacred Heart* against the opposition of others. She braved the precariousness of being a pilgrim in the new world of education of young Italian women while never taking her eye off the goal of dissemination of love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus in her works with the Italian army and the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan.

I was privileged to be in attendance at her beatification in the Milan Cathedral April 2022. (As an aside, our president Barbara Pandolphi, also the president of my own Institute of Secular Institute of the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ, worked tirelessly for years on this cause.)

A revival of emphasis of fixing one's eyes on the Absolute took place over the past few years in my own country beginning with the Eucharistic Revival in 2022, culminating at the Eucharistic Congress in July 2024. The bishops had recognized that there had been a weakening of belief by large percentages of Catholics in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and so created these pilgrimages to express and strengthen belief. Members of my own institute and other institutes in the US participated in these events.

And just recently in anticipation of the United States' celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 2026, the Catholic Bishops of the United States solemnly consecrated the United States of America to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This spiritual act entrusted the country's present and future to Christ's love, mercy, and protection. The Declaration of Independence highlights the Creator as the author of all rights.

As pilgrims on this precarious road, we travel with others, remembering that keeping our eyes fixed on the Absolute depends on our fixing our eyes on those next to us, in front of us, beside us as fellow pilgrims in need of the tender care of the Christ we carry in ourselves.

After the international scene in August, comes the national scene in September at St Louis

A Few Reflections on the Annual USCSI Meeting



The USCSI Annual Meeting was held at the Augustine Institute in Florissant, Missouri, from September 11-13, 2026.

The Augustine Institute recently relocated from Denver, CO, and is now located on 286 acres with a main campus, beautiful chapel, lovely cafeteria in the shape of an airplane cockpit, with views of the Missouri River, and residential halls named after the four Gospel writers. The campus, located 20 minutes north of St. Louis Airport with several well marked hiking trails through a wooded path, takes you down to the shores of the Missouri River. It is truly an oasis of tranquility and beauty! Several of us took the opportunity to hike the longer trail and it did not disappoint.

There were 21 attendees in person and approximately 13 remote attendees. Fr. Scott Jones of the Priests of the Heart of Jesus, presided at the evening Mass, Friday, September 11th with a Mass of Remembrance and offered an opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Saturday afternoon. We were also honored and blessed to have two Archbishops join us - Most Reverend Mark S. Rivituso, Archbishop of Mobile, Alabama and Episcopal Moderator USCSI to the USCCB, and the Most Reverend Mitchell Thomas Rozanski, Archbishop of St. Louis, Missouri.



Archbishop Rozanski presided at the morning Mass, Saturday, September 12th and expressed his deep appreciation and prayers for Consecrated Life in Secular Institutes and our presence in the world. Archbishop Rivituso was present for our meetings and presided at the morning Mass, Sunday, September 13th. Archbishop Rivituso invited us to be open to the graces God desires to give during the time of our meeting and to help each other answer God's call.

Our featured speaker for the annual meeting was the very joyful Jerry Stookey, OP, who presented, "*Blessed are the Peacemakers in Secular Institutes*." In quoting Margaret Mead (1901-1978), a famous American anthropologist, "*What difference can one person make?*"

Fr. Stookey invited us to take personal responsibility in peace-making efforts and offered a simple and yet very practical approach by asking three questions before we speak:

(1) Is it true?
(2) Is it necessary?
(3) Is it kind?



A Few More Reflections on the Annual USCSI Meeting

We were able to take some time at our tables to share on how, either in our work or in our community, peace is promoted. Fr. Stookey also suggested incorporating innovative games that may be more collaborative in nature, rather than competitive, to further peacefulness in our communities. One example of this may be by writing on a piece of paper, "Once upon a time a secular institute was formed." The piece of paper would then be passed to another member to fill in the next part of the story and so on!

Sharing on the topic of vocations, turn to pages 6-7 for Fr. Scott Jones' timely advice. Archbishop Rivituso strongly recommended we attend our individual diocesan celebrations for The World Day of Consecrated Life and added, "*it is a beautiful witness for the Church to understand consecrated secularity."* We ended our Saturday evening with a short video on the life and sanctity of Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen (now Blessed Fulton Sheen) in anticipation of his beatification in St. Louis on September 24th.

On Sunday, September 13th after Lauds, Mass and breakfast we listened to the Business Reports and re-elected Jessica Swedzinski, Secretary and elected Beth Schwartze, Treasurer. Congratulations to both. We want to thank all those who participated in attending this meeting and all those involved in the planning and preparation. It was a special grace for me to attend and see God's generous love in each of you! -*Cathy McDonnell*



I would say that I really enjoyed the weekend as a first-time attendee. It was very nice to meet other women and men who are living the same life I am as a vowed consecrated secular living in the world. God bless all of you!

-Mary Daniczyk





Few, but mighty!
Onwards and Upwards!

Vocation Promotion Vocation Promotion Vocation Promotion

by Fr Scott Jones, Priests of the Heart of Jesus

As we know, institutes of consecrated life have experienced a decrease in numbers in recent decades. As serious as that is for religious communities, it is even more serious for secular institutes, since our vocation is less known. Fortunately, given our charism, we don't need to be BIG; we just need to be VIBRANT. An institute with a few members of various ages, including an occasional new member, has a bright future.

In 2016, my own institute (the Priests of the Heart of Jesus), was down to eight members in the United States between the ages of 70-90. They had not had a final profession in many years. Since then, four of those elderly members have died, yet we are up to 21 members due to growth. We took a serious look at advertising and website promotion, which helped tremendously. Admittedly, most institutes don't have a lot of money to advertise, but there are a few simple steps that can greatly increase visibility. I will outline them below:

1) Bulletin blurbs: Some parishes are willing to include an occasional SHORT blurb. It should be simple and without graphics: "If you are a single woman interested in living consecrated celibate life while remaining in your own home, following a simple rule of life with the support of other consecrated women, please visit www.myinstitute.org or contact Jane Doe at janedoe@gmail.com." Some pastors will allow an ad like this, others won't. Don't be discouraged by the ones who refuse. All it takes is one or two parishes to agree to include your ad and you may get some inquiries. To do this, I suggest you contact the vicar for consecrated life in your diocese and say that you would like to approach a couple of pastors about a bulletin announcement (so if a pastor calls the diocese, they are already aware). The next step would be calling the parish secretary and ask about the process for submitting an announcement for the bulletin. (They might even have paid ads on the back which are very cheap.)

2) Diocesan paper-Articles: Articles in diocesan papers tend to be online forever. When your institute has a first/final profession or a special event, write a brief article that includes what a secular institute is, a description of your institute and how you live, etc. If your institute doesn't have any professions, you could submit something for consecrated life day. If you are interested in pursuing this, you could contact the editor of the paper and ask if at some point the paper would be willing to cover this vocation…like many priests and religious, the editor probably doesn't know this vocation exists.

3) Diocesan paper-Advertising: Your diocesan paper accepts paid ads that aren't expensive, especially if you keep it simple (similar to a bulletin blurb). If you choose to advertise and can't afford many ads, run one for a few weeks and a few months later repeat the process. People normally need to see an ad a few times before they decide to act.

4) Consecrated life events: SHOW UP for the consecrated life Masses. When the diocesan paper publishes jubilees, submit the names of your members who are celebrating 25, 50 or 60 years of consecrated life. If the diocese has vocation events, ask to be invited.

Vocation Promotion by Fr Scott Jones - *continued*

5) Vocation pamphlets: Make sure your institute has a vocation pamphlet or simple poster. Take it to the college Catholic student centers and give them to the campus minister to set out or post.

6) Follow up with something to offer: If you get inquiries, stay in contact with them and invite them to your monthly meeting. If prospective members live at a distance, set up a monthly Zoom meeting. If most of your members are elderly, then invite a couple of vibrant laywomen to attend the Zoom meeting even if they aren't prospective candidates so that the faith sharing will be vibrant.

7) PATIENCE: I was the only new member for several years in my institute when I joined. It takes time…but even two or three new members who are excited about the vocation will give your institute a whole new lease on life.

Two final recommendations:

1) Young and middle-aged adults who are discerning consecrated life are especially focused on consecrated celibacy…that is simply where they are at. Make sure you highlight consecrated celibacy in any advertising that you do.
2) When you meet with them, listen to what they are looking for. My institute had to renew itself in order to receive new members, and we did so by listening to what is important to the next generation.

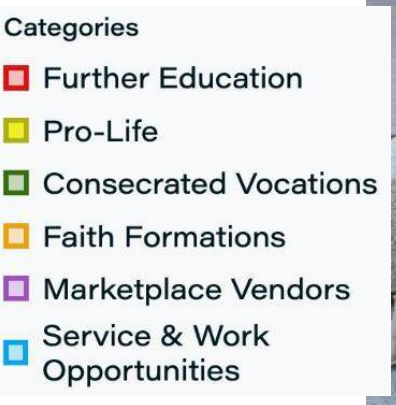
Reserve the dates and topics of the inter-institute formation classes for 2026-27. As usual, they will be on Saturday mornings at 9:30 CENTRAL TIME. Fr Scott will send out the links closer to each date. Also, we are opening these classes up for finally-professed members, since at our last USCSI national gathering we felt the classes would be good for ongoing formation.

Saturday, November 14: Perseverance/discernment (consolations and desolations in the spiritual life, fraternal support, spiritual direction, charism of each institute)
Saturday, February 13: History and evolution of secular institutes
Saturday, May 8: Witness of consecrated life in the Church
Saturday, August 21: Topic to be determined

A Shout-Out – YOU DID IT! – Goes to **Kathy Tierney** for laboring long and hard:

Major Victory! These are the SEEK Sponsor categories. They changed Religious Vocations to Consecrated Vocations!

Great news for all in Secular Institutes, Societies of Apostolic Life, Consecrated Virgins and Hermits, published on Labor Day Weekend, Sept 5, 2026.









On our annual retreat in July, **Natasha Sager** made her **Definitive Dedication in Caritas Christi** on July 22, The Feast of Mary Magdalene at Christ The King Retreat Center in Buffalo MN. His Excellency The Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda celebrated Mass in the presence of her family and friends. A beautiful reception followed with good food and fellowship.







Heather and Rachel

Company of St Ursula is joyful as two make Consecra-tions for life in Sept





Congratulations to Claudette Cyr as she celebrated 70 years of Consecrated Life on August 26, 2026!

Claudette is a member of the Secular Institute of the **Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate** since **1956**. She served multiple terms as District Director and on their international administrative counsel for 6 years.

On the national level she served the U.S. Conference of Secular Institutes as president for 7 years, vice president for 6 years, secretary for 9 years, and counselor for over 6 years. In addition, she continued to serve as the graphic designer for their quarterly newsletter.

In 1961 she worked in Canada and Texas. From 1971 on she served in the Immigration Depart. until retirement in 2007. Now as Principal Officer once more of the OMMI, she cares for family members and her quilting passion.



Definitive profession of Elizabeth M took place on August 9, 2026, at San Damiano Retreat House in CA. She is fourth from left with her Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ in celebration joy.





100 Years of the Secular Institute of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary

October 1, 1926 - October 1, 2026!

1926 2026

Begun in Germany, members are from 42 nations living in 32 countries





We had fun, food, prayer and fellowship!
October 31, 2026, Father Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata, West Covina, CA

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. It is an organization of member institutes committed to making known, understood, and appreciated the call to consecrated secularity in the Church. The USCSI collaborates with other groups to present consecrated secularity as a viable option in today's society.

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Also find us on **Youtube, Instagram, and Facebook**

All contributions and photos for our **Winter *Mountaineer*** are due by **December 1, 2026,** to jessica@schsrsmary.org or text 262-244-9329.
Will you host a Christmas Party and invite all Consecrated Life persons in your area?
Share how you plan to organize a Vocation Day in your Diocese for February 2, 2027.

An echo from our Summer Issue: *Very nice issue. I will make time today for "un cafecito!"*

Take Time To Mark Your Calendars for these two Important Dates:

➡ Saturday, February 6, 2027 – ZOOM Meeting for All – time TBA

➡ National Meeting Sept 17-19, 2027, at Marytown, Illinois
It is going to be "All About Secular Institutes" Not to be Missed!

Psalm 103 of David

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
2 Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
3 who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
4 who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
5 who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

