

Members of the National Conference of Vicars for Religious gathered at the Jesuit Spiritual Center in Milford, OH from March 13-16, for **NCVR Assembly 2023**, the first in-person National Assembly since 2019. The Southern Region, under the able leadership of Regional Chairperson, **Sr. Celeste Larroque, SEC**, was the host region attending to all of the practical details of the Assembly.

Prior to the official opening of the Assembly, there was an **Orientation for new members** conducted by members of the National Board. (That Powerpoint – *New Vicars Orientation 2023* – is available here on the website.)

With her characteristic blend of wit, wisdom and Southern charm, **Sr. Celeste Larroque, SEC** welcomed everyone, and set the tone for what was to be a wonderful gathering.

**Sr. Maryann Seton Lopiccio, SC**, President of the NCVR, addressed the Assembly, offering significant, salient points in the context of an inspiring spiritual reflection. (The full text of Sr. Maryann's Address is located here.)

The National Board chose the theme for the Assembly - "*Along the Paschal Journey*" - reflecting our involvement with Congregations facing fulfillment or completion. Presenters were invited to offer expertise and the lived experience of this reality. Each of the presentations was hope-filled and realistic as to the reality of these times and the work that needs to be done along this Journey.

**Sr. Mary Pellegrino, CSJ** gave us a theological and historical context for this Journey, showing us the on-going development of consecrated life from its early origins to the diversity we experience today.

**Sr. Sharon Euart, RSM** set before us the canonical and civil structures that identify and support consecrated life today. In her usual professional and easy way, she walked us through what needs to be tended as communities move toward fulfillment or completion.

**Sr. Mary Jo Nelson, OLVM** gave us the nitty gritty experience of leading her congregation to accepting a Commissary last September. She shared all of the steps and processes they used in their discernment and how well the sisters responded.

A highlight for the Assembly was having these three presenters as an informal panel open to our questions, concerns, and remarks. That flow was an easy sharing of all these different perspectives clearly focused on the end goal: how to support and accompany the groups in our diocese. We couldn't capture that dynamism to share with you, but each person there was energized to keep this conversation going among us in our ministry to communities in our dioceses.

**Sr. Stephanie Still, PBVM**, Director of the National Retirement for Religious Office, joined us again as she had in the past, but this year offered a thorough walk-through of the application process, underscoring the vital bridge that Vicars provide between the religious congregations in the various dioceses and the NRRO.

Representatives from the **Religious Formation Conference (RFC)** and the **National Religious Vocations Conference (NCVR)** joined the Assembly via Zoom and facilitated

a dialogue around the topics of vocations and formation which, although not specifically the responsibility of the vicars for religious, are topics which we fully support.

**Fr. Hank Lemoncelli, OMI** joined us virtually from his current ministry at King's House in Buffalo, MN where he walked us through the in's-and-out's of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. It was much more comprehensive a presentation than in recent years and followed upon a presentation that he gave in October, 2022 to members of the Canon Law Society of America. Although Fr. Hank is currently retired from his work in the Dicastery, his expertise from his many years there makes him a valuable resource.

**Sr. Rosemary Reese, Isp** and **Sr. Kelly Connors, PM J.C.L.** joined us via Zoom from the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to give us available updates and take any questions from the members of the Assembly.

**Sr. Kathy Warren, OSF** from the Diocese of San Diego and **Sr. Maria Carlos-Valdez, EIN** from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles offered an insightful dialogue around an exciting new initiative in partnership with the **Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)** and the **Conrad Hilton Foundation**. The initiative is well underway in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and holds potential for eventual involvement with Vicars for Religious from other dioceses around the country.

**Regional meetings** afforded members to gather together in person by region to discuss topics that are either of general interest or of particular interest to the region as well as to establish the format and frequency of the regional meetings and activities.

The 4 members of the **National Board** offered their reports to the Assembly at large.

Sr. Maryann thanked **Sr. Gilmary Kay, RSM** for her services as Secretary to the Conference saying that Sister is remaining in her position in the Washington DC Archdiocese, so will continue to be an active member of NCVR.

Sr. Maryann also thanked **Sr. Mariette Moan, ASCJ J.C.L.** for her 8 years of service to the Conference as Treasurer and technical assistant. Since she is no longer in position at the Archdiocese of Hartford, her membership in the Conference and as a Board member can no longer continue. Sr. Maryann, with approval of the National Board, announced that Sr. Mariette has been named to a new adjunct position to the Conference as "Technical Integration Manager," working with the Executive Board and Regional Chairs, updating the NCVR website and presence on social media, as well as managing the technological platforms used by the NCVR. Additionally, Sr. Maryann has asked Sr. Mariette, a canon lawyer specializing in religious law, to function as a liaison between the NCVR and the Commission on Religious Institutes of the CLSA of which Sr. Mariette is a member. The Assembly affirmed these two new positions for S. Mariette.

**Sr. Ann David Strohming, OSF**, Delegate for Religious from the Diocese of Wilmington (DE) and Eastern Region Chairperson, and **Sr. Pat Worman, OP**, Delegate for Religious

from the Archdiocese of Newark (NJ) led the Assembly in the Elections for the new Board members. Their term begins at the June Board meeting and will continue for three years until 2026.

President: S. Maryann Seton Lopiccolo, SC  
Vice President: S. Elizabeth Ann Vasquez, SSCJ  
Secretary: S. Anna Nguyen, SCC  
Treasurer: S. Patricia Worman, OP

As has become a customary gesture at the conclusion of each National Assembly, **Sr. Celeste Larroque, SEC** and Chairperson of the Southern Region, gave the “key” to **Sr. Ann David Strohming, OSF** and Chairperson of the Eastern Region as the National Assembly 2024 will be hosted by the Eastern Region.

That evening, the entire Assembly enjoyed the stirring sounds and inspirational music of one of Cincinnati’s own Catholic music group.

It was agreed upon that, while technology provided the option of “going virtual” for the years that the country battled the reality of COVID, the benefits of gathering in-person are second-to-none. The time spent in prayer, deep listening, meaningful dialogue in the large-group as well as in table discussions, easy conversation in front of the fireplace that lingered well into the night, reinforced the graces and blessings that are part of our ministry at the service of the Church in the United States and the friendship and support that we share with each other.