

'Weave Peace,' Religious Urged

By Robert L. Johnston
 Baltimore (NC) — Some 700 members, affiliates and guests at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious' national assembly in Baltimore heard nuns urged to be "weavers of peace" in the Church, religious life and society.

Major superiors of nuns were urged to be ministers of "unrelenting reconciliation," even though the good news

they bring, like the good news of Jesus, "is painful and threatening to a lot of people."

The messages of peacemaking and reconciliation came from Sister Helen Flaherty of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, outgoing LCWR president, and Sister Juliana Casey, a provincial of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

While aimed primarily at projecting the peacemaking role of women in a world preoccupied with force and violence, including the danger of nuclear arms escalation, the messages also referred to internal healing and reconciliation within the Church and religious communities themselves.

The talks by Sisters Flaherty and Casey served as twin keynote addresses for

the Aug. 14-18 assembly. The meeting was marked by an unprecedented number of closed "organizational sessions," one of which featured dialogue between Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco, who heads a U.S. bishops' commission mandated by the Vatican to work with religious communities in assessing their renewal since Vatican II.

Archbishop Pio Laghi, apostolic delegate in the United States, was the main celebrant for a Mass August 15, the feast of the Assumption.

The archbishop praised the "clear presentation of Marian devotion" provided by the nuns for the liturgy, which included the distribution of the Eucharist under both species by the sisters.

Last year, at a joint meeting of the LCWR and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, controversy arose when sisters served as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist at Archbishop Laghi's Mass.

Archbishop Laghi was joined in concelebration of the liturgy by Archbishop William D. Borders of Baltimore, host of the meeting, and Auxiliary Bishop Amedee W. Proulx of Portland, Maine, who serves as liaison between the U.S. bishops and the LCWR.

Featuring nine workshops on aspects of peacemaking and reconciliation, the assembly chose as its theme "Weaving Patterns for Peace."

Sister Flaherty told the meeting that "peacemaking has always been a part of our

mission," but added that "what we (nuns) have really been about, and very earnestly for the last 20 years, is weaving ever so slowly, but equally as surely, a whole new fabric of apostolic religious life in which the dominant strand of peacemaking is becoming...more visible."

Alluding to conflicts nuns have undergone during their renewal since Vatican II, Sister Flaherty said that the "signs of the times challenged us to exercise our prophetic role."

"We did examine and critique," she said. "We did strategize and we did take public stands on important issues of the day. We did not allow discouragement or public criticism to remove our hands from the loom," she said.

She challenged participants to answer three calls: To use "your creative instincts" to help people find new environments in which "hope and mutuality, respect and openness can grow"; to create networks for promoting peace; and to produce well-developed documents which can reach and influence other people with new and creative approaches to peacemaking.

Sister Casey, a consultant to the committee that developed the bishops' war and peace pastoral, called on assembly participants to counter the raw power of

force and violence associated with the superpowers with a "truer kind of power," one that "enables...is dynamic and joyous," the power of Christ.

"Such power reconciles, and it is here that we reach the heart of peacemaking," she said.

Noting the difficulties inherent in being reconcilers, she said "what we must do is reconcile like Jesus did. We must become ministers of unrelenting reconciliation."

"We, Roman Catholic Religious, citizens of the United States and of the world, are asked to think in new ways because everything has changed — except the word of God in our midst," Sister Casey said. "We cannot go backwards; nuclear weapons are a fact, they exist by the thousands."

Vatican II is history and "we have been transformed by that time of grace," she added. "The raising of women's consciousness has raised our own and we cannot deny what we know."

U.S. Nuns Misunderstood, Archbishop Quinn Says

Baltimore (NC) — Critics from the right and left have seriously misunderstood the religious renewal of American nuns in the past two decades, said Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco in a speech Aug. 16.

Setting a theological framework for the work of a papally appointed commission on U.S. religious life that he was recently named to head, the archbishop told U.S. women religious superiors meeting in Baltimore that their greatest accomplishment since the Second Vatican Council has been simply "living in fidelity to your vocation" through the tension, turmoil and attacks they faced over those years.

He spoke of the sisters' efforts at postconciliar renewal and of the identity

crises, numerical declines in vocations and other problems that accompanied renewal as an experience of Christ's passion and cross. But it is precisely that religious experience, he said, that is now the source of a new depth and vitality among women Religious.

Archbishop Quinn delivered his speech, his first on the special papal commission since it was formed in June, to the national meeting of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Setting a possible tone for the conduct of the commission's work, he suggested that Religious have borne the brunt of the "hard and demanding years since the Vatican Council" but are now in a position to be one of the most dynamic and life-giving

forces in the church.

The thrust of the commission's task, he said, is to begin a dialogue between bishops and Religious so that "through the bishops, the religious orders can engage all of the church in this renewal of religious life."

Archbishop Quinn noted that "an enormous cost" accompanied the postconciliar renewal of religious life, including a "striking numerical disintegration" in religious orders and a host of tensions and problems that accompanied this.

"At the same time," he said, "American sisters were exposed to an unprecedented level of misrepresentation and attack from both the right and the left."

"Sisters who had for so long lived as the object of an almost uncritical awe within the church, now were exposed to two implacable critics: Shril accusations that their catechetics were destroying the church, that their every change was a betrayal of their heritage, that they had become worldly, compromised women who deserve their own decline. Or from the left came the arched suggestions that religious life could only attract the sexually stunted, the socially and economically insecure, an unenlightened and declining remnant from a dated church."

"There are circles," the archbishop added, "in which to be a woman Religious today is to walk into an atmosphere of the joke half-told, of suspicion or unconscious arrogance sometimes on the part of clerics, of the question that waits for no answer, of the unrelenting and constant demand for justification."

Archbishop Quinn noted historical parallels in which periods of the greatest vitality of religious life in the church followed periods in which religious orders had faced some of their deepest crises.

And from the perspective of faith, he said, the understanding of religious life as "essentially sacramental" requires the acceptance of the passion and the cross as a prelude to the resurrection.

MURDER CLAIMED
 Buenos Aires, Argentina (NC) — Argentine Bishop Enrique Angelelli was murdered, probably by security forces, in 1976 and did not die in an automobile accident as was officially reported at the time, according to a statement issued Aug. 4 by Argentine Bishop Jaime De Nevares of Neuquen. The statement was released on the seventh anniversary of the death of Bishop Angelelli, who headed the rural Diocese of La Rioja from 1969 until his death.

Viewpoint: Sisters Reflect



By Sister Wanda Hess, RSM

What Is Peace?

What is peace? This is a question I often ask myself. Is it visible? What do I do to achieve it?

I remember visiting a woman in her 90s. Sickness had taken its toll. All she could do was touch my hand and say how good I was. One had the feeling that she knew her Beloved and herself.

Did she know peace? Was her peace visible? I guess not to the naked eye, for she didn't march or stand for anything profound in the eyes of this world, but in the depths of her heart, despite pain, there was a deep inner peace. One could not but believe that she had been touched by God and was a "holy" person.

There was the young college girl who felt unloved because her parents were fighting at home and seemed to forget her. I can remember sharing thoughts about self-worth with her. I remember watching as she worked with the migrant children and recall the pizza and ice cream parties she had for them. As class president she was involved in every imaginable project.

Life for her was such a joy! Everyone was beautiful to her and she let them know it. The pain of rejection she felt at home had somehow freed her to be available and to care!

Was this peace? Was it

visible? It was very visible if you came into contact with her, for quickly you knew love and that you were worth a great deal. Despite her home situation, she conveyed a feeling that life and all that's in it were beautiful.

To suffer a stroke is very difficult; many people are left unable to communicate. One man I met was left unable to talk and everyone had given up on him. He lost his job; three years later his wife left him and his children had moved away.

No one seemed to want to accept the fact that he couldn't speak or to share their lives with him. Rejected by everyone, he came to therapy. I remember how hard he tried and how he practiced night after night.

I can still remember his joy at his first sound and then his first words. He often shared his sorrows and sufferings by pen. His courage brought him a new "birth" filled with a deep peace, a peace that was not easily purchased.

These three unique situations speak of a peace obtained through suffering. The manifestations of that peace were very different, but a cross always accompanied the peace.

We need only look to Christ for our example. A body and spirit that's broken finds Christ at its center.

Sister Wanda Hess, RSM, is a speech pathologist working in private practice.

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