A photograph of a dirt path winding through a forest. The path is covered in a dense carpet of small purple flowers, likely grape hyacinths. The trees are tall and thin, with bright green leaves, suggesting a spring setting. The overall scene is vibrant and peaceful.

Annual Report

2016

RELIGIOUS FORMATION CONFERENCE



Mission Statement

The Religious Formation Conference fosters and serves initial and lifelong formation for members of religious congregations of women and men.

Our Context and Vision

Impelled by God's prophetic Spirit, rooted in the Gospel, and responsive to the mission of Jesus, we will proclaim the Reign of God by our life and mission.

Informed by our Catholic tradition and attentive to the signs of our times, we move forward grounded in a contemplative stance, the exercise of communal discernment, a growing appreciation of the interdependence of all life, and solidarity with those living in poverty and on the margins.

from the Executive Director

Some years ago at the end of Eucharist on the feast of Epiphany, children handed out pieces of chalk and rolled-up blessing prayers to everyone in the congregation. We were encouraged to “chalk our doors” using the symbols 20 + C + M + B + 15, with C, M, and B representing both the names of the Magi as well as the Latin phrase: *Christus mansionem benedicat* (May Christ bless the house). Each year on Epiphany the sisters with whom I was living at that time change the last two digits on the community room doorway blessing to correspond to the current year.

This ancient practice carries deep significance as we seek God’s blessing on our home, on each of us, and on our coming and going. Each time we enter or leave the room we cross its threshold with the simple symbols overhead.

Each threshold that we cross carries meaning, but some have particular significance: being carried home as newborns, starting school for the first time, moving to a new home, entering a religious community, and starting a new job. We can recall some of the feelings that accompanied these crossing overs. Personally I remember with gratitude the warm reception that I received when I entered the RFC offices on January 4, 2016; any lingering nervousness about starting this new ministry quickly dissipated in welcoming embraces.

Whenever we approach a threshold we stand on an edge, on an in-between. It is no surprise, then, that the word “liminal” has “threshold” as its root meaning. We are neither inside nor outside; neither here nor there. Rather, we are in the thin space of the edge. This is often where we are called to stand as vowed women and men religious.

The Religious Formation Conference literally crossed thresholds this past year as we moved from our offices in Washington, DC to new space at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. The transition of place called us to let go of what had become familiar and to embrace many new realities. In some ways we continue to stand in our office doorway and on the threshold, though we have long since unpacked and settled in. This enables us to live on the edge: to meet and greet the new as neither insiders nor outsiders. It is a sacred space to be in.

In many traditions and in ancient mythologies there were gatekeepers to accompany and assist people as they passed through one space into another (including Saint Peter at the gate of heaven!) In a similar way, we did not make this journey to Chicago alone, nor do we as religious enter into “the new” unaccompanied. There are others there to help in the move and to guide with the passage. As we look back on the year we are most grateful for those who assisted in the packing and the moving, in the leaving and the coming, and in the crossing and the entering.

All of our doorways are blessed, for God not only accompanies us in the journey but is also there ahead of us. May Christ continue to bless our houses and their doorways, our transitions and their thresholds, and all of our comings and our goings.

Ellen Dauwer, SC

Ellen Dauwer, SC
Executive Director



On the threshold of the new...

2016 at the Religious Formation Conference: An Overview

Clearly the Religious Formation Conference crossed many thresholds to welcome the new during 2016.

Four merit particular attention.

- On January 4th, **Ellen Dauwer, SC** assumed the position of Executive Director of the Conference, bringing to her new responsibilities a wealth of experience in higher education and congregational leadership, energy and enthusiasm for the mission of the Conference, imagination and creativity.
- Although **the Year of Mercy** had begun just before 2016, when Pope Francis opened the Holy Door and crossed its threshold, the Conference celebrated this new Jubilee year by featuring articles in its bulletin *InFormation* written by RFC members on their congregations' response to be mercy, to extend mercy.
- After an extended period of transition that included personnel changes and relocation, the Conference applied for and was awarded **a grant from the GHR Foundation** to engage in an eighteen month strategic and emergent planning process that will enhance its ability to welcome the new. Work on this process began in the summer and was fully engaged by September 2016.
- And who can count the thresholds crossed as the Conference left the Hecker Center in Washington, DC and relocated its national office to the campus of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, IL?

Here the new was waiting!



Top: Planning Process Steering Committee at work
Middle: Office under construction; Leaving Washington
Bottom: Blessing the new space

Program Offerings and Services: 2016



ForMission

A formation program especially for religious who are new to or preparing for formation ministry, in 2016 **ForMission** engaged thirty-one participants from three distinct cohorts, representing nineteen congregations and six countries of origin other than the United States. It met for two residential sessions, one at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, the other and at Catholic Theological Union. At OST, the session focused on *Formation for Religious Life*, at CTU on *Religious Life and Mission in the 21st Century*.

Each residential session brought *ForMission* participants into conversation with presenters expert in the fields of theology/ecclesiology, Scripture, culture, and spirituality, and included a day on skill development.

Photos:

Top: ForMission Team, 2016
left to right: Michael Avila, FSC; Joan Stoverink, ASC; William Meyer, SM; Regina Robbins, SND

Bottom: Lynn Levo, CSJ, presenter, June 2016



Orientation to Formation

A weekend workshop for new formation personnel or seasoned ones wanting to refresh their ministry, for leadership persons who serve as liaisons to formators, for members of formation communities,

Orientation to Formation was offered at CTU in early December 2016; presenters Helen Cahill, OP and Henry Beck, OFM led twenty-two participants in reflection on *Formation in the 21st Century: Emerging Reality and Praxis*.

Photos:

Top: Presenter Helen Cahill, OP
Bottom: Presenter Henry Beck, OFM, and participant;



Life Commitment Program

Because of its relocation to Chicago, the Conference was unable to offer the third of its regular programs, the **Life Commitment Program**, in the summer of 2016.

Webinars

The Conference offered four webinars during 2016, two on the spirituality arising from new understandings of the cosmos, another on the challenges today's technology, especially social media, carries for religious life, and during Advent, a reflection on mindfulness. RFC webinars regularly attract an international audience; ordinarily some 200-300 persons register for a particular webinar, with many of those registrations reflecting groups who will view it together on the day it is broadcast. Webinars are archived for future (or repeat) viewing at no charge to RFC members and are available to others for a modest fee.

Services and Publications

RFC staff continues to offer consultations, by phone, email, or personally, to member congregations on matters pertaining to initial and lifelong formation. The Conference's website is updated regularly and contains a wealth of information and resources for members. ***InFormation***, the Conference's quarterly bulletin, is available to Conference members on the RFC website.



Fall Workshop Series

Conversations at the Well was the overarching title for a series of three workshops the Conference offered in the fall of 2016. Drawing on John's story of the conversation between Jesus and a woman at a well in Samaria, a conversation in which each crossed significant boundaries, the series used the concept of crossing borders/boundaries as a metaphor for the challenges religious face today in mission and culture, in their congregations, and in their personal lives. Presenters included Jung Eun Sophia Park, SNJM and Teresa Maya, CCVI in Chicago, IL (border crossings in mission and culture), Helen Marie Burns, RSM in Seattle, WA (transformative congregational challenges), and Donald Bisson, FMS in Rancho Palos Verde, CA (personal transformation).

Photo: Presenters and participants in Chicago workshop, September 2016

“Keep presenting quality days of reflection and professional development; you do this well!”

National Board & Committees

The National Board of the Religious Formation Conference

Robert Clark, FMS
Elaine Davia, CBS
Steven Dillard, SJ*
Mary Glackin, IHM*
Kathleen Goike, IWBS
Joye Gros, OP*
Anna Hang-Nga Nguyen, SCC
Karen Hawkins, SP
James Paradis, OSA
Marilyn Pray, SSJ
Raul Salas, OMI
Kathleen Turley, RSM
Noreen Walter, SCL*
Ellen Dauwer, SC, ex officio*



Left to Right: C. Regan, M. Pray, S. Dillard, E. Dauwer, K. Hawkins, R. Clark, J. Gros, N. Walter, R. Salas, E. Davia, K. Turley, J. Paradis, K. Goike, K. Kandefer, M. Glackin (Missing: A. Nguyen)

*Executive Committee of the Board

Finance Committee

Steven Dillard, SJ
Anna Hang-Nga Nguyen, SCC
Michaela Heulbig*
Christopher Strub Kelly*
James Paradis, OSA
Carol Regan, SUSC
John Williams*
Ellen Dauwer, SC, ex officio
Katherine Kandefer, BVM, staff to Committee
*Investment Sub-Committee

Steering Committee for Planning Process

Ellen Dauwer, SC
Jennifer Gordon, SCL
Marie McCarthy, SP
James Paradis, OSA
Carol Regan, SUSC
Corrina Thomas, fspa
Susan Weber, facilitator

Governance Committee

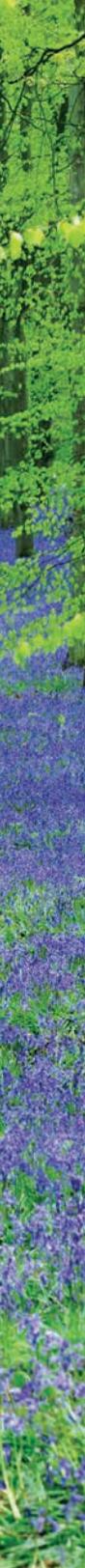
Elaine Davia, CBS
Raul Salas, OMI
Kathleen Turley, RSM

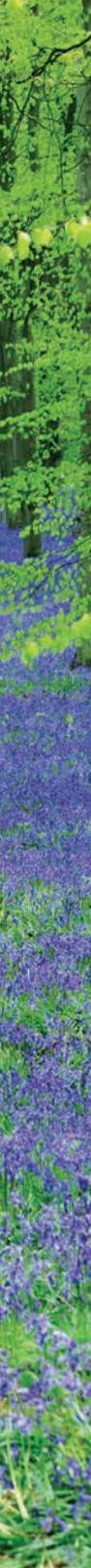
Congress 2017 Planning Committee

Ellen Dauwer, SC
Karen Hawkins, SP
Katherine Kandefer, BVM
James Paradis, OSA
Marilyn Pray, SSJ
Carol Regan, SUSC

Mary Emil Penet Award Committee

Robert Clark, FMS
Mary Glackin, IHM





RFC Membership

Collaborating Groups and Organizations

1954 saw one of the first instances of significant collaboration among religious congregations in the United States, when a group of intrepid and visionary women religious came together to form the Sister Formation Conference, the SFC. In 1976, the SFC crossed a new threshold to welcome congregations of male religious to Conference membership, thus creating the Religious Formation Conference, the RFC. Today the Conference proudly carries forward this rich heritage.

The Membership of the Religious Formation Conference

In 2016, membership in the Conference remained at the 200 mark, that is, some 200 religious congregations either renewed or chose to join the Conference, with congregations of women religious comprising about 75 % of Conference membership. When a congregation, monastery, or a unit of a congregation such as a province or region joins the RFC, the Conference considers that all its vowed members belong and enjoy the privileges of RFC membership.

Congregations holding membership in the Religious Formation Conference, their leadership, formation personnel, and all their vowed members are the Conference's primary collaborators, as all work together toward the transformation of religious life for the sake of mission to the world today.

Collaborating Groups & Organizations

Crossing thresholds in 2016 widened the RFC's circle of collaborating groups and organizations. We are grateful for those with whom we collaborated while the Conference was based in Washington and, in many case, will continue to do so; we have welcomed the new possibilities for collaboration which our location at the Catholic Theological Union offers.

The Brothers Think Tank
The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)
The Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (CSCL)
Communicators for Women Religious (C4WR)
The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) and its Formation Committee
The Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR)
The CTU Formation Council
The GHR Foundation
Giving Voice (GV)
The Institute of Religious Formation
The J. S. Paluch Company
The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)
The Leadership Development Collaborative
The Mexican American Catholic College (MACC)
The National Association of Vocation/Formation Directors (NAVFD; Canada)
National Catholic Sisters Week
The National Conference of Vicars for Religious (NCVR)
The National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO)
The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC)
The Religious Brothers Conference (RBC)
The Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI)
The USCCB: Office of Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations

Finances

2016 Income

Dues	\$ 189,136
Programs & Workshops	\$ 149,134
Publications & Resources	\$ 205
Miscellaneous	\$ 6,798
Dividends & Interest	\$ 39,103
Net Gains on Investments	\$ 70,389
Donations & Grants	\$104,048
Total Revenue and Gains	\$558,813

2016 Expenses

Administration	\$ 50,035
National Board	\$ 10,322
National Office	\$362,808
Programs and Workshops	\$ 126,348
Total Expenses	\$549,513
Net Revenue	\$ 6,997





RFC Contributors

Significant financial support for the RFC comes from the membership dues paid by our primary collaborators in mission, those religious congregations, provinces, and other units belonging to the Conference. Many of them choose to assist the Conference in other ways as well: through financial donations, membership on the RFC Board, on standing or ad hoc committees, and the provision of in-kind, voluntary service to the Conference. In this they are joined by foundations, vendors, and others who support the mission of the Conference.

We are proud to list our benefactors and are immensely grateful to all of them.

The Alexian Brothers
The Edmund Rice Christian Brothers
The Dominican Sisters of Peace
The Felician Sisters of North America
The Franciscan Sisters of Allegany
The GHR Foundation
The Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart
The Holy Union Sisters
The Jesuit Conference of the USA and Canada
The Little Company of Mary
The Marist Brothers
The Maryknoll Sisters
The Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity
The Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostle (Paulist Fathers)
The Oblates of Mary Immaculate
The Order of Saint Augustine (Augustinians)
The Paul Borg Construction Company

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ
Region 3, Religious Formation Conference
The Religious of Jesus and Mary
The Sisters of Bon Secours
The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati
The Sisters of Charity of Halifax
The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth
The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth
The Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth
The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
The Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio
The Sisters of Christian Charity
The Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament
The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
The Sisters of Mercy, West-Midwest Community
The Sisters of Providence, Montreal, Canada

The Sisters of Providence, Renton, WA
The Sisters of Saint Francis of the Neumann Communities
The Sisters of Saint Francis, Rochester, MN
The Sisters of Saint Joseph of Orange
The Sisters of Saint Joseph of Peace
The Sisters of Saint Joseph of Rochester, NY
The Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, PA
The Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries
The Society of Saint Edmund

If we have inadvertently omitted a benefactor, please alert us to this error so that it can be corrected in the next Annual Report.

RFC Regions



For some time, the Conference has been divided into geographic Regions, primarily to foster mutuality between the national organization while responding to specific local needs. For example, the national staff of the Conference is pleased to respond to regional requests for particular programming, presentations, and other services whenever possible. When Conference events are held in different parts of the country, members of the local region offer valuable on-site material support; this is especially so for the Conference's biennial National Congress.

The Regions of the Religious Formation Conference, currently fifteen in number, are determined by the Conference's Board of Directors. While some are geographically vast, even non-contiguous, others are compact, with one consisting of a segment of a single state. Consequently, some are densely populated,

others sparsely so. In some Regions, congregations are receiving new members while in others, congregations have not welcomed newer members for some time. All are undergoing significant change.

As the RFC's strategic and emergent planning process begun in 2016 with the grant from the GHR Foundation continues into 2017, the Planning Steering Committee will study the membership structures of other organizations similar to the RFC and consult with Board, staff, and members to devise a model that will best serve the initial and lifelong formation needs of religious in the United States today.

Photo: Joint RFC-NRVC meeting in Region 15, the Pacific Northwest, May 2016

Welcoming the new in 2017...

While it will continue its historic mission of fostering the initial and lifelong formation of vowed religious and supporting those entrusted with the ministry of formation within their communities, the Religious Formation Conference will welcome new staff, new possibilities, new approaches to time-honored activities in 2017.

- **Constance Schoen, OP**, hired as Program Director in November 2016, assumed her new responsibilities in January 2017, bringing to her position a rich background of congregational and organizational leadership;
- Building on the series **Conversations at the Well**, in the spring of 2017 the Conference is offering **Continuing the Conversations**, a new series of workshops focused on the skills religious need to “cross borders” successfully, as they meet the challenges confronting them;
- The Conference’s signature offering, its biennial **National Congress** will be held in Milwaukee, WI in November 2017. The Congress theme, **Grace in the Now: The Gospel of Encounter**, reflects Pope Francis’ insistence that encounter is a source of grace and blessing. New features at Congress 2017 will include younger religious, both women and men, as respondents to keynote presentations; a seminar offered in Spanish and in English; and a

Post-Congress workshop on re-imagining religious formation for the future, based on a sociological and theological analysis of religious life today;

- By the end of 2017, the Conference will have completed the strategic and emergent planning process made possible by the GHR Foundation’s generous grant. With a new mission statement, a renewed sense of vision, and goals and objectives that move the Conference into a future full of hope, the Religious Formation Conference will have crossed another significant threshold in its long and continuing service to religious men and women.

A hint of the new...



Watch for the roll out of the RFC’s new logo in coming weeks.





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