

February 2008

## LCWR Participates in Delegation to Witness Plight of Iraqi Refugees

**A**t the invitation of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a delegation of US women religious, accompanied by two lay CRS staff, traveled to Lebanon and Syria from January 11-20 to witness the suffering of Iraqi people who have fled the violence of their country and to raise awareness of their situation with their constituencies upon their return.

The delegation consisted of: Arlene Flaherty, OP, CRS staff and former LCWR member; Anne Curtis, RSM, LCWR member; Toni Harris, OP, former LCWR member; Simone Campbell, SSS, executive director of NETWORK and former LCWR member; Durstynne Farnan, OP, justice and peace director for her congregation; Clare Nolan, GS, NGO representative for the Good Shepherd sisters; Carmen Villegas, Las Hermanas; Laura Sheahan and Jenna Welch, CRS staff; Marie Lucey, OSF, LCWR associate director for social mission; and CRS guide Vivian Manneh, based in Cairo.

The purpose of the visit was to experience the reality of the Iraqi refugees in Lebanon and Syria, to increase understanding of the factors impacting their lives, and to become aware of the work of CRS and its partners in the region. The delegates plan to educate and advocate through their respective constituencies and networks in ways that will advance justice and peace for Iraqi people who have fled the violence in Iraq.



*A Palestinian-Iraqi boy in a shelter for refugee mothers and their children in Damascus, Syria. While Iraqi refugees are tolerated in Syria, those who flee Iraq but are of Palestinian origin are less welcome. (Photo: Laura Sheahan for CRS)*

The delegation met with Iraqis and persons working with them in a variety of settings in Lebanon and Syria. From Caritas/CRS agencies, from UNHCR (UN High Commission on Refugees), from bishops in Beirut and Damascus, and from communities of women religious

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### On This Holy Mountain LCWR-CMSM Assembly Denver, Colorado



- Outstanding Keynoters
- Important Discussions on LCWR's Shared Future
- Opportunities for Input and Conversations on Religious Life Leadership

Mark your calendars for  
August 1-5, 2008

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- 6** LCWR Offers Array of Services

*From the LCWR Presidency*

## Embracing What is Beyond Our Control

by Mary Dacey, SSJ — LCWR Past President

I am writing this reflection in the afterglow of holidays and New Year's resolutions. From talk shows to ordinary conversations, everyone seems caught up in the desire to lose weight, become fit, and make healthy life choices. For us as religious, especially those in leadership, the "resolution of choice" often has more to do with slowing down and getting off the treadmill of activity and busyness. Easier said...



of dealing with multiple administrative tasks, how do we find the time to deal with larger questions of belief and belonging in our church, in our world, and in our universe? How do we find the time for the "other side of the tracks" issues or people that get in the way of our prepared agendas?

Life comes at us with breakneck speed, and the pace of ministry can be overwhelming, especially in leadership. Even worse, God can seem like that conductor of the Express, unwilling

Over the holidays I had the opportunity (actually I was forced by my three-year old nephew) to watch the movie *The Polar Express*. The story depicts the journey of three young children who board a train bound for the North Pole the night before Christmas. The older boy struggles with questions of believing. The poor boy from the other side of the tracks deals

to rescue us from our own fast pace. But maybe we can learn from the children. They are not defeated by the speed of the train; rather, they respond to the conductor's invitation to enter into the chaos of the ride to help the train reach its final destination. And they make time for one another in the process, especially, the young girl who is the model of inclusion.

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*... not one character's question or struggle was resolved because the train stopped moving or slowed down.*

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Perhaps, our resolution should not be so much about controlling or reducing the busyness in our lives (although there are surely times when that is appropriate). Perhaps it should be about embracing what is beyond our control, stepping into the chaos of

with issues of belonging. The girl (most delightfully) emerges as the leader who faces the many challenges along the way with courage and compassion. What is most obvious about the story is the breakneck speed at which the train travels and the immediacy with which choices have to be made. The conductor seems unwilling or unable to moderate its speed; rather, he consistently invites the children to participate in steering/guiding the train through some harrowing twists, turns, and potential disasters.

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*Perhaps [our resolution] should be about embracing what is beyond our control, stepping into the chaos of life, and recognizing God's presence in the people and situations that fill our days.*

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What struck me most about the film was that not one character's question or struggle was resolved because the train stopped moving or slowed down. And I thought of all the "ifs" in my busy life. If only I had more time. If only I could get a break. If only life would slow down. Often, the reality is that life, like that express train, does not slow down for us. In the midst

life, and recognizing God's presence in the people and situations that fill our days.

In the long run, these desires are more about relationship than resolution because they are first and always God's desire. And the only appropriate place from which to respond to a busy life is the still point of a contemplative heart.

## Update on the New Orleans Recovery Project

### A Collaborative Effort of LCWR and FADICA

Immediately following the hurricanes of 2005, LCWR members quickly responded to the needs of the communities of women religious, particularly those in the New Orleans area. Members checked the LCWR website where the sisters' immediate financial and material needs were posted and the assistance began to pour in.

The assembly of 2006 in Anaheim included a panel of four leaders from New Orleans who deeply moved the LCWR members once again. At the business meeting during the assembly members called for a renewed effort to assist the New Orleans sisters. In response to the call of the assembly, LCWR in collaboration with FADICA (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities) created the position of Coordinator of the New Orleans Recovery Project dedicated to seeking funding for the sisters of New Orleans. The operational budget for the position, originally envisioned for six months, was provided primarily through FADICA by congregations of women religious.

After interviewing several candidates for the position of project coordinator, FADICA and LCWR hired Suzanne Hall, SNDdeN for the role. Suzanne is an experienced educator as well as an attorney and a very effective grant writer. Since her hiring Suzanne has been hard at work trying to determine what is needed and how



*Women religious continue to minister to the people affected by Hurricane Katrina, due in part to the generosity of donors*



*A scene from the evacuation of the Ursuline sisters in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina*

to match the sisters' needs with foundation grants and other donations.

To begin with, Suzanne met at least twice with each of the eight congregations in New Orleans. She also consulted with business and civic leaders from the city as well as with representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers. Based on her visits and conversations, Suzanne prepared a major report on the socio-economic situation in New Orleans as well as a comprehensive inventory of the needs of each of the New Orleans communities.

To date, Suzanne has approached approximately 45 foundations, charitable trusts, and potential donors with proposals for funding. The status of the current grant requests is as follows: more than \$2M (2,064,108) has been received and distributed; another \$250,000 is under active consideration; another approximate \$500,000 is still pending action; and finally, approximately \$1.2M in requests has been rejected.

Thus far, convents have been rebuilt and refurbished; an educational program for infants and pre-schoolers has received assistance; an adult learning center has been infused with new life; a project in the upper 9<sup>th</sup> ward assisting residents has been broadened; and major building projects for schools and retirement homes are beginning to receive matching grants.

In light of Suzanne's outstanding work, and because of a recent generous donation from the SC Ministry Foundation of Cincinnati, the position of project coordinator has been funded for another six months.

*(continued on page 4)*



## LCWR Sponsors Leading From Within Retreat in Tucson

Twenty-five LCWR members gathered at the Redemptorist Renewal Center at Picture Rocks in Tucson, Arizona from January 20 - 25 for the fourth annual LCWR Leading from Within Retreat.

Directed by Maria Elena Martinez, OSF and Margaret O'Brien, OSU, the retreatants spent the days in prayer and reflection on various spiritual life themes as they relate to religious life leadership. The retreatants heard input from Maria Elena and Margaret, had opportunities for group and individual direction, and participated in communal prayer and rituals. Said one LCWR member about the retreat, "This may be one of the best weeks you will have in leadership."

Each retreatant received a *reboso* (a woven shawl) made by women in Chiapas, Mexico which she used throughout the retreat.

Carole Shinnick, SSND and Annmarie Sanders, IHM staffed the retreat.



Margaret O'Brien,  
OSU and Maria  
Elena Martinez,  
OSF



## Update on the New Orleans Recovery Project

*(continued from page 3)*

During this time, Suzanne will engage in a second phase of needs assessment and development efforts. In addition to Suzanne and her tireless efforts, special thanks are also due to Frank Butler, executive director of FADICA and Sally Duffy, SC of the Sisters of Charity Ministry Foundation. Both Sally and Frank have been helpful colleagues offering invaluable advice, assistance and support. Also, the entire SC Ministry staff assisted Suzanne in the production of the New Orleans Recovery Project Report.

The tragedy of Katrina and the devastation still evident in New Orleans has called forth the energy, generosity, and imagination of so many who have helped in the aftermath of the hurricanes. Thanks to LCWR communities the help continues – because there is still so much to be done.

## LCWR Participates in Delegation to Witness Plight of Iraqi Refugees

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the delegation learned about the staggering needs for shelter, employment, education, healthcare, and psychological services.

The delegation will be working on follow-up action for education, advocacy, and assistance projects. As concrete actions are identified they will be shared with the LCWR membership. A more complete report by Marie Lucey on the trip as well as additional photos are available on the LCWR website at [www.lcwr.org/lcwr/socialjustice/issues.htm](http://www.lcwr.org/lcwr/socialjustice/issues.htm).



*Two girls stand in a shelter near Beirut for Iraqi refugee mothers and their children. With funds from Catholic Relief Services and other donors, Caritas Lebanon runs the mountaintop shelter. It is estimated that 50,000 Iraqi refugees now live in Lebanon, where they are not allowed work permits. (Photo: Laura Sheahen for CRS)*



*Children stand in a shelter for refugee mothers and their children in Damascus, Syria. The shelter, run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, reaches out to the 1.5 million Iraqi refugees now in Syria. (Photo: Laura Sheahen for CRS)*



*In Damascus, an Iraqi refugee boy stands beside his mother and her registration certificate from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Iraqi refugees must register with UNHCR to receive humanitarian aid like medical care and to be processed for resettlement in other countries like Canada. Because getting a visa to another country can take years, and because they are not allowed work permits in Syria, many Iraqi refugees in Syria have become increasingly destitute. (Photo: Laura Sheahen for CRS)*

*Marie Lucey, OSF talks with Marie-Claude Naddaf, a sister of the Good Shepherd in Damascus. (Photo: CRS Staff)*





## Are You Taking Full Advantage of All LCWR Services?

LCWR offers members a wide variety of services. Please check the list below to be sure that you are aware of all the benefits that are made available to all LCWR members.

- the monthly LCWR newsletter, *Update*
- the LCWR journal, *Occasional Papers*
- attendance at the annual assembly
- inclusion in the LCWR messaging system for immediate updates
- access to the LCWR website, including a password-protected area for members
- access to the LCWR Resource Sharing Forum\*
- an e-mail contact list for justice and peace alerts

In addition, the conference offers a variety of activities and programs to support leaders and to strengthen the relationship of LCWR members with other significant groups. Some examples are:

- an annual workshop for new leaders
- an annual retreat for leaders
- availability of *Leading from Within*, a manual for leaders to use in developing their leadership skills through group supervision and/or one-on-one mentoring (An order form for this publication can be found on the LCWR website at: [www.lcwr.org/lcwrpublications/mentoringleadershipmanual.htm](http://www.lcwr.org/lcwrpublications/mentoringleadershipmanual.htm))

\*The LCWR Resource Sharing Forum is a listserv that is open only to LCWR members and associates that provides a means for communicating with one another online with a question or to share information. When members are looking for information on possible speakers, facilitators, policies, resources, or have specific questions, they post a message to the listserv. Members with information to share are asked to respond directly to the person asking the question so that all listserv members are not receiving multiple e-mails with information that may not interest them. Persons who register with the forum also have access to archived forum postings. There is no charge for this service. Information on registering for the forum is on the password-protected area of the LCWR website (Members Information).

Also on the password-protected area is an extensive listing of educational resources on child sexual abuse and

prevention. Members are reminded that during 2008 LCWR will re-issue an inventory to assess the preparedness of LCWR member congregations to address sexual abuse. The inventory, developed in conjunction with persons from a variety of disciplines and perspectives, will look at two questions:

1. What policies, practices and procedures do LCWR member congregations have in place to address allegations of past member sexual misconduct?
2. What policies, practices and procedures do LCWR member congregations have in place to prevent future sexual misconduct by members?



### February 15: Deadline for Ordering the 2008 LCWR Reflection Book, *At the Edge of Tomorrow*

The deadline for ordering additional copies of *At the Edge of Tomorrow*, a new LCWR daily reflection book, is February 15. The reflections in this year's book will be focused on what it takes to live courageously into an unknown future. The hope is that the book will inspire people to move forward with a sense of deep hope, a desire to be creative, a willingness to dwell with unanswered questions, and a sense of excitement about what might be ahead as religious life stands on the edge of tomorrow.

The reflections in the book are designed for use between May 31 and July 22.

LCWR members, associates, and subscribers will receive a copy of the publication.

*From the LCWR Executive Director*  
**‘Up, Up, and Away’**

**H**ot air balloons are not the most efficient forms of transportation. You don't hear anyone saying, "I'm going to catch the 8:35 AM balloon to San Francisco. I should get there sometime early next month." Or, "Did you hear the latest TSA regulations for hot air balloons? Carry-on luggage is limited to a half sandwich and a hanky!" No. Hot air balloon travel will never appeal for its utility or for its on-time arrivals. Rather balloons are transportation for those seeking beauty, adventure, and a fresh perspective. Balloon travelers may be among the few who complain that the trip was too short.



**Carole Shinnick, SSND**

pressed to name a clear destination for the trip, even if they are not too sure where they are going themselves. They may periodically need to remind some of the passengers to keep their hands inside the gondola, and not to lean out too far.

In addition to deciding when to use up precious fuel to create new heat for the balloon, sometimes the pilots also have to decide about when and what to toss if the energy supply runs low. It is possible that some things that seemed essential

at the journey's outset might have become liabilities as the fuel sources diminish. On occasion pilots need to jettison excess baggage in the interest of the whole.

Like the pilot, leaders are both passengers and peers. Yet they also carry unique responsibilities that can burden and isolate them from the others in the same basket.

Similar to the desert over which the balloons floated in Tucson, the landscape of religious life today may sometimes seem harsh, the cacti foreboding, and the pathways shifting. Nevertheless, if you have to pass through the desert anyway – and don't we all have to do it at some point – perhaps a lighter-than-air balloon, silhouetted against a rising sun, carried forward by a steady breeze is a pretty good way to travel. So try not to worry about an on-time arrival or a definite destination. Let your adventurous self come out for awhile. Then just hang on and enjoy the ride.

On a January morning, during the 2008 Leading from Within Retreat in Tucson, I was sipping coffee and watching the sky gradually lighten from a deep teal to an orange-blue. Unexpectedly one - then two - hot air balloons gamely peeked over the pre-dawn horizon. I was thrilled to see them. We don't see a lot of hot air balloons here in DC (though – I cannot resist adding – Washington does have a plentiful supply of hot air, particularly between the Capitol and the White House.)

At first the balloons appeared to be struggling to climb. It seemed a slow and shaky start. But with each blast from the gas jets, hot air poured into the balloons, and the graceful giants gently floated up, barely skimming the spiny saguaros. Then – as the song says – it was "up, up and away!"

Balloons have no rudders, giving new meaning to "going with the flow." The pilot may have some basic information about prevailing winds and weather, but once aloft, the one "in charge" has little say about the direction of the drift. To a great extent all on board – pilot and passengers alike – can only trust the breeze and enjoy the scenery. I guess that's really the point of a balloon ride.

As the retreat unfolded, I often recalled those bobbing, rudderless balloons carrying their tiny basketsful of people. Leaders in religious life may be a bit like balloon pilots. They may feel responsible for providing the passengers with a safe and meaningful ride. They may feel



## Upcoming LCWR Dates

### Systemic Change Think Tank

*Franciscan Renewal Center  
Scottsdale, Arizona  
February 4 — 7, 2008*

### LCWR New Leader Workshop

*The Retreat Center at St. John's  
Plymouth, Michigan  
March 13 — 16, 2008*

### LCWR-CMSM Joint Assembly

*Denver, Colorado  
August 1 — 4, 2008*

### LCWR Leading from Within Retreat

*Franciscan Center  
Tampa, Florida  
January 12 — 16, 2009*

### LCWR New Leader Workshop

*The Retreat Center at St. John's  
Plymouth, Michigan  
March 19 — 22, 2009*

### LCWR Assembly

*New Orleans, Louisiana  
August 11 — 15, 2009*



*Update* is an official publication of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious published monthly and distributed to members nationally.

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## From the Center for the Study of Religious Life

### CSRL Board Plans for the Future

As the center enters its tenth year, its board of trustees is looking to the future. The board is focusing on three areas: shifts in programming, creative use of technology, and simplification of organizational structures. CSRL will sponsor fewer workshops. Instead, the director will prepare a variety of presentations on current trends in religious life for regional and national gatherings of congregational leaders. Greater use will be made of the center's web site and tools such as webcasting.

Due to these shifts in programming, starting in February, there will no longer be a program coordinator position at the center. Virginia Piecuch has decided to retire at this time after serving CSRL and its mission in this position for almost 10 years.

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APRIL 16-18, 2008  
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#### Faculty

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Mary Reichert, JD  
Daniel Ward, OSB, JD, JCL

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See [www.lrcr.org](http://www.lrcr.org) for more details and registration form



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## Violet Grennan, MFIC Begins Role as RFC Executive Director

Violet Grennan, MFIC recently assumed the role of executive director of the Religious Formation Conference. As a member of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, she most recently served as international vice-president of the congregation.



She brings to RFC a broad spectrum of national and international experience in both initial and ongoing formation with women and men religious. She also offers a passionate conviction to the conference's mission and vision as well as its commitment to transformational learning and life-long formation in religious life. Violet embraces this mission at an axial moment in religious life.