

UPDATE

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Leadership Conference
of Women Religious

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2003

LCWR's Voice Heard 'On the Hill'

At the invitation of Jim Wallis, founding editor of *Sojourner's* magazine, Constance Phelps, SCL, LCWR vice-president and Carole Shinnick, SSND, LCWR executive director, joined an ecumenical group of 25 religious leaders to raise the plight of the nation's poor to the nation's lawmakers. For five years, Reverend Wallis has gathered a similar group in Washington in the week immediately following Pentecost to advocate for the most vulnerable US citizens who are impacted by decisions made inside the Beltway.

LCWR and CMSM have been invited to become partners in this effort of Reverend Wallis, known as *Call to Renewal*. The focus of the group is always the same: the end of poverty in the United States. Despite theological and religious differences among the delegates, all are committed to this clear objective. This year the group spoke in particular to the combined impact of the cost of the war on Iraq, and the enormous tax cut voted into law by congress.

During the three days of June 9, 10, and 11, the group met with White House staffers, conversed with several

senators from both sides of the aisle, and participated in a congressional prayer service, convened by Reverend Wallis and lead by Minority Leader, Representative Nancy Pelosi. Constance and Carole were two of the three women in the group, and with Stan DeBoe of CMSM, were the three Catholics participating in the delegation.

In July the LCWR Executive Committee favorably reviewed an invitation from *Call to Renewal* to become regular partners in the group. The National Board will consider the recommendation of the Executive Committee at the post-assembly meeting of the National Board. LCWR members will hear more about the outcome at the fall regional meetings.



Reverend Jim Wallis (center, wearing a dark shirt) meets with the 25 religious leaders on June 9, 2003 who participated in the *Call to Renewal*. (Photos courtesy of the *Call to Renewal* website -- <http://www.calltorenewal.com>)

LCWR's Voice Heard 'On the Hill'



A congressional prayer service was convened by Rev. Jim Wallis, founding editor of Sojourner's magazine, and led by Minority Leader, Representative Nancy Pelosi.

Members of the Call to Renewal delegation join hands in prayer before setting out to meet with several White House staffers.



Delegation to El Salvador Forming to Commemorate US Churchwomen Martyrdom

The SHARE Foundation: Building a New El Salvador Today is organizing a delegation to El Salvador to commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the martyrdom of the four US churchwomen from November 30 - December 6, 2003.

SHARE invites any LCWR member or member of an LCWR congregation to join them in this pilgrimage to honor Ita Ford, MM; Maura Clarke, MM; Dorothy Kazel, OSU; and Jean Donovan who dedicated their lives to the struggle for human dignity, truth, justice and peace in the world. The delegation will include participation in the anniversary commemorative events, an advocacy meeting with the US embassy, and visits to the countryside to accompany communities and learn about the women's empowerment and community development projects of SHARE.

For more information, please contact Amy Nahley, Tel. 415-412-5905, 415-239-2595 or email: amynshare@yahoo.com.

Movement in Hope: Conversations on a Theology of Religious Life

Religious Formation Congress 2003 and Jubilee
(1954 -- 2004)

Sheraton Westport Plaza Chalet
St. Louis, Missouri

November 6 - 9, 2003

Special presentations by
Mary Maher, SSND and
Gary Riebe-Estrella, SVD
and theologians from diverse cultural and
consecrated lifeform backgrounds

The annual Orientation for New Formation Directors
is scheduled to precede the Congress
(November 4-6) at the Sheraton Westport.

A meeting of the Gathering Voice group
(women religious under 55)
is also planned preceding the Congress.

More information at <http://www.relforcon.org>

From the Executive Director

We Will Never Be the Same Again

"It will put meat on your bones!" shouted the voice-over from the TV in an ad celebrating the virtues of a Big Mac. "Yeah - just what I need!" I muttered back at him. And then, in an instant, I was transported back to one of those personal watershed moments that come uninvited, and always with long-term effects on the rest of our lives.

It was 1986 and I was visiting our sisters in El Progreso, Honduras. I had landed in the airport at San Pedro Sula and was driven to El Progreso along a highway lined on one side with lush, verdant banana plantations, and on the other with rolling pastures filled with well-fed cattle. Soon I would learn that the US-based United Fruit Company owned the banana plantation, and that the cattle were being raised by a variety of American fast-food chains.

I also learned that the best land for crops and cattle in Honduras belonged to foreign companies, most of them headquartered in the United States. Honduran farmers were forced to toil on little outcrops of rock with thin topsoil, or on steep, sloping hillsides frequently and easily washed away in tropical storms. The Honduran people in general did not, could not eat the fruit of their own land.

One of our SSND sisters in El Progreso had for years run a nutrition center for children and she invited me to visit it. Nothing could have prepared me for the experience. The center cared for the very worst of the malnourished children in El Progreso. I saw sad, wizened faces of very old people on the fragile bodies of tiny children. I saw child after child whose heads were extremely flattened in the back because in their four or five years since birth, they had never had the strength to lift them. I held

one tiny little boy who stared at me with unsmiling, sunken eyes, whose body felt like a thin tissue paper envelope holding the light-as-air bones of a small dove. And I thought of those banana trees. And I remembered the grazing cattle. I have not been able to eat a banana since then, and although I might get a chicken sandwich in a fast food restaurant, I can't even think of getting a hamburger. To be honest, it just sickens me.



Some transformations are like that – they sneak up on you, and take you by surprise – and you're never the same again. I mention this, first of all to myself, and then of course to you, my sisters, on the eve of our assembly in Detroit. I am thrilled with the speakers, delighted with the workshops, and very

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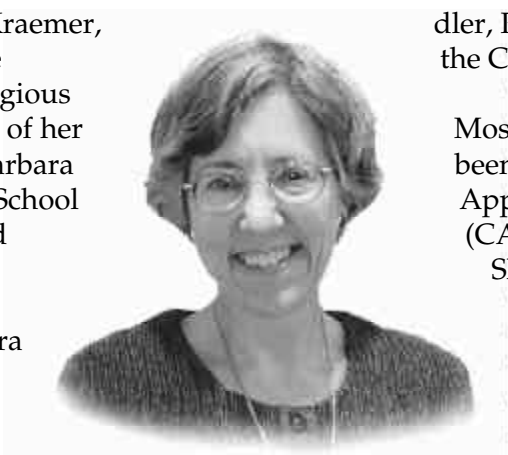
excited about the banquet. But you know what – I am a bit fearful, too. I have this hunch that another transforming awareness awaits us all there. I have a feeling that we are going to realize that we – you and I – are holding our world just as I held that tiny little boy. And I am pretty sure that once we realize how we have contributed to our planet's fragile state, we will never be the same again. Never.

New Director Appointed for the Center for the Study of Religious Life

In February 2003, Barbara Kraemer, OSF, the first director of the Center for the Study of Religious Life, was elected provincial of her congregation. On July 1, Barbara assumed leadership of the School Sisters of St. Francis, United States Province.

LCWR congratulates Barbara on her new role in leadership, grateful that we will still be seeing her at LCWR gatherings, now in the capacity of member. Barbara undertook an enormous task when she agreed to be the first CSRL director. There were no maps, no precedents, and no established patterns. With great equanimity, steady scholarship, and quiet enthusiasm, Barbara embraced her task and welcomed the challenge. We are deeply indebted to Barbara for her tireless commitment to creating a new entity, which now seems so familiar.

Happily, our Provident God has sent us a new director who will lead the Center with zest and creativity. Mary Charlotte Chan-



Mary Charlotte Chandler, RSCJ

andler, RSCJ will assume leadership of the Center in September 2003.

Most recently, Mary Charlotte has been working at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University.

She holds a doctorate in religion and society from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California with a concentration in the sociology of religion.

Her doctoral thesis was entitled: "Supporting the Social Identity of Women

Religious: A Case Study of One Apostolic Congregation of Women Religious in the United States."

Mary Charlotte holds three masters degrees in theology, sociology, and computer science. Given that the mission statement of the Center is to "conduct interdisciplinary and intercultural reflection on the life of Catholic religious...in the United States..." Mary Charlotte seems uniquely qualified to become its next director. LCWR looks forward to meeting and working with Mary Charlotte.

Alert NETWORK Lobby Day

NETWORK is organizing a lobby day to close the School of the Americas on Tuesday, September 23, 2003 in Washington, DC. Sponsors include CMSM, LCWR, and religious congregations with members who have or are prisoners of conscience. Details about the day will follow. Please consider participating in the day, and/or arranging for your justice and peace personnel, and other congregational members to attend.



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