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REGNUM CHRISTI NEWS OF THE WEEK

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Struggle

Regnum Christi Live – January 20

By Fr Simon Devereux LC



" Difficulties break some men but make others.

No axe is sharp enough to cut the soul of the sinner

who keeps on trying, one armed with the hope he will rise in the end."

- Nelson Mandela

I'm driving inland to the center of the South Island of New Zealand with my brother Mark. He's pointing out the vineyards that have been popping up all over during the last 20 years producing some of the world's best pinot noir.

Mark tells me that the soil isn't good and the temperatures are very hot in summer and very cold in winter. This means the vines have to struggle and their leaves often look tatty. Counter-intuitively these factors produce the best grapes, as most of the nutrients go the fruit and not to the leaves.

So if you feel like your leaves aren't green and bushy: don't worry, God is probably producing wonderful fruit in your life!

He had a dream

Regnum Christi Live – January 21, 2014
By Jim Fair



In August, 1963, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech, to me the most moving work of oratorical art in American history.

Oh, there are some speeches by Ronald Reagan that move me. And nobody doubts that Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address is brilliant – but rumor has it that Lincoln had a squeaky voice, so the delivery likely wasn’t that impressive. But the writing was remarkable.

The text of King’s speech is clear, simple and elegant. But it is the delivery that sets it apart and makes it extraordinary.

If you have not watched and listened to King’s speech, you really should. I always find myself fighting back tears.

The tears have always come from the pain of knowing the country I loved once tolerated slavery and terrible discrimination against many of its people. The tears have become thicker over the past decade as I realize how miserably we have failed in pursuing his dream. Frankly, we’ve made quite a mess of it.

Were Rev. King to suddenly spring back to life, he likely would be thrilled to learn that we have a Black President, Attorney General and various senior White House advisors. He would learn that many Blacks are prominent in the arts, sports and education.

Then he would learn the bad news. The Black unemployment rate is twice the White rate. A third of the Black population since his death was never born; it was aborted. Our national government is campaigning to eliminate

the belief that marriage is a union of one man and one woman. The vast government programs that were supposed to help people have devastated the Black family.

He would be deeply saddened. But I believe he would point the way out of our misery.

He would remind us of the importance of faith in Almighty God. He knew that government wasn't intended to grant or deny rights – that they come from God. And our society's problems can only be solved by our becoming a God-fearing people with strong families and freedom to seek life, liberty and happiness.

Today is January 21, 2014. Yesterday was the holiday that rightly honors Rev. King. Tomorrow is the March for Life in Washington, DC. If he could be there, Rev. King would add a dream to his glorious speech of 1963: "I have a dream, that every baby – Black or White, male or female – will grow up strong and healthy and enjoy the freedom of life in this great nation."

Special Ordination Issue

U. S. A. | WHO WE ARE | NEWS

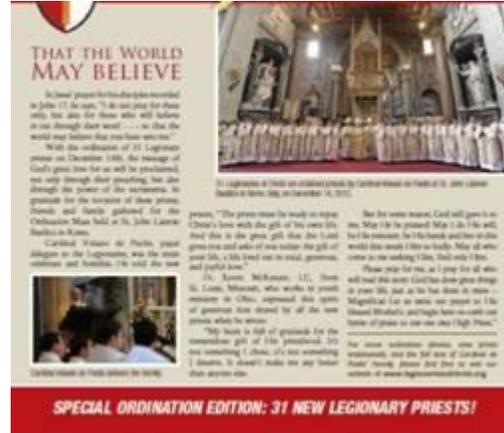
The latest "JOY of Catholic Living" magazine features the recent Legion of Christ ordinations

The December, 2013, ordinations of 31 new Legionary priests are highlighted in a special edition of The *JOY of Catholic Living* magazine, now in the mail to friends of the Legion and Regnum Christi. The magazine's front page article provides an overview of the ordination Mass in Rome and homily from Vatican Delegate Cardinal Velasio De Paolis. Prominently featured are the eight priests ordained from North America.

Readers will enjoy the many photos of this joyful event, as well as a spiritual



reflection from Fr. Shawn Aaron, LC. This edition also spotlights the helpful formation tools available at RCSpirituality.com, and in the “Lights of the World” segment, readers will meet Eleanor Pinugu, an RC member recognized for her work serving the poor and underprivileged in the Philippines. Click [here](#) to read this latest JOY issue.



The front page article gives an overview of the December, 2013, ordination Mass.



Go to the desert

Regnum Christi Live – January 22, 2014
By Fr Simon Devereux LC

*"To receive the grace of God you must go to the desert and stay awhile."
Blessed Charles de Foucauld*



Every Catholic who really desires to grow in their friendship with Christ and wants to learn what God wants them to do, should be going on a week-end retreat once a year.

There are many good retreats out there, including those given by my brother Legionaries in Cheshire, Philadelphia, NY, Atlanta, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc...we all need to make serious time for God. Sunday Mass and even daily prayers will never be enough! Make this part of your new year's resolution, and put it on the calendar now!!

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Our Lady of Guadalupe and the New Evangelization

U. S. A. | WHO WE ARE | NEWS

RC member Rhonda Jones talks about her experience at a conference on “evangelization in the Americas” at the

Basilica in Mexico City

*During November, 2013, a special event took place at Our Lady of Guadalupe Basilica in Mexico City. It was a four-day conference that, according to press reports, was inspired by John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America* and focused on the evangelization of the Americas. Called "Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelization on the American*



Continent" the event, sponsored by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (PCAL), the Knights of Columbus, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Higher Institute of Guadalupean Studies, drew about 600 pilgrims.

There were a limited number of invited guests who participated in the working sessions at the conferences, and among those was Rhonda Jones, a member of Regnum Christi from Canandaigua, New York, in the Diocese of Rochester. She had the grace of attending this "Pilgrimage and Encounter" (as the working invitees referred to the event) and she is so very thankful to her friend, RC member Karen Stein of Cazenovia, New York, for the opportunity. Karen was invited to attend the first of these conferences held at the Vatican in December 2012, and she stated that her experience was not something she could keep to herself. "Rather it is to be shared so that others can come to a deeper understanding of the New Evangelization and a profound appreciation of where the heart of the Church is in light of this mission," she said. (Click [here](#) to read the first of her

blog series on her experience.)

After attending the 2013 event with Karen, Rhonda now wants to share her experience with the rest of the RC movement. Following are her answers to our questions.

Explain more about how you came to attend this event?

My dear friend Karen was first invited to attend the initial meeting last December, convened by PCAL and the Knights of Columbus - held in the Synod Hall, Vatican City. It was a small meeting and to be an invited guest was very special. It was run especially by PCAL leadership, Carl Anderson (Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus), Monsignor Chavez of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and attended by Pope Benedict XVI, as well as several cardinals, archbishops and bishops, and leading Catholics.

Knowing how strong my devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe was, Karen shared her experience with me and suggested that I get the book and the document they discussed there -- [Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of the Civilization of Love](#) by Anderson and Chavez, and [Ecclesia in America](#) by Pope John Paul II -- which I did.

I had studied a lot about Our Lady of Guadalupe before and yet I found that I was learning so much more. I was about to start a new Regnum Christi team and approached the women to see if they would be willing to study these two readings for our study circle this year. They were thrilled, especially because several of them were involved, like me, in [Pilgrim Queen of the Family](#) groups already.

To step back a bit, I am a convert from Judaism. It wasn't until I had been Catholic for about seven years that I first encountered Our Lady of Guadalupe, after I learned about Regnum Christi through the Regnum Christi consecrated women, and was told the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe at a Women's Morning of Reflection.



Karen Stein (left) and Rhonda Jones (right) with Dr. Guzman Carriquiry Lecour, secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.



For a few months, that image was displayed at local RC events as part of a fund-raising raffle. I looked at it as a piece of art and didn't think anything of it. Then, during a May Morning of Reflection, when another RC member (CarmenAna Klosterman) shared at length the story about Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego and the miracles, everything changed for me.

Ever since that morning, I wanted greatly to visit the Mexico City Basilica and see Our Mother's image on Juan Diego's tilma. I dreamed of going to visit with one of the consecrated women, but that just didn't work out. Eventually, when the drug-related violence in Mexico was escalating, I gave up my belief that I would go. It would have to be up to Our Mother and Christ.

Then, in spring (2013), my wonderful husband Larry gave me, for my birthday, a round-trip ticket to go to Mexico City, saying that it probably was safe enough for me to go! He wanted me to go with a friend, so I asked Karen Stein, and she said, "Yes."

In August, we booked a mid-November 2013 trip. A week before we left, Karen called to tell me something amazing – that the follow-up meeting to the one she attended last December was planned to be held at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe on exactly the same days that we were going to be there! Now, that was something very striking! She called PCAL in Rome and asked if we could be invited. Several days later, when I came home from daily Mass and after which I had just said the final prayers for my 33 Days Consecration to Our Blessed Mother (using Father Michael Gaitley's book), I checked email messages and saw that we were indeed invited guests.

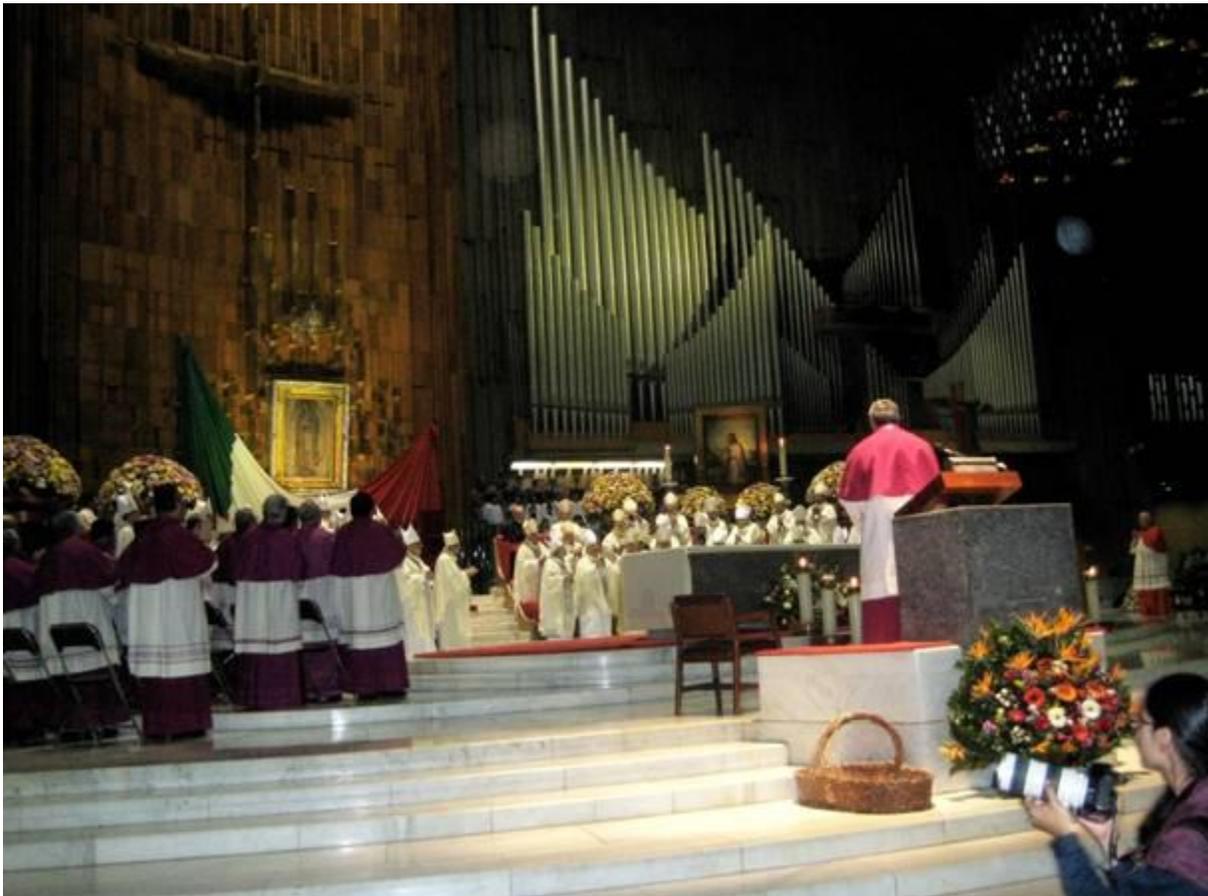
At the time, they couldn't place us at the hotel, as there was no room available, but we were able to find a place to stay at the outskirts of the city, quite a distance from the Shrine with the relative of a Regnum Christi friend I know. When we arrived, before the conference began, we went to the Shrine to see Our Lady and get instructions. That afternoon we received a call that a hotel room had indeed opened up for the two of us to stay with the other guests!

What were you hoping to get out of attending?

Because I had felt drawn to Our Lady of Guadalupe for years, I wanted to

understand why this was so. I hoped to come to a deeper love for and understanding of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the symbolism and importance of her image and story, as this might lead me, and then others, to a greater love for Our Mother and for Christ. I hoped to thank her “in person” for watching over me.

Also, I would come to more closely understand how Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego related to the New Evangelization and how this story could help



the whole world. As Our Lady of Guadalupe played such a significant role in reinvigorating the Catholic Church and bringing about millions of conversions, I felt an internal challenge to help more people learn the story and its creation of a “Civilization of Love.”

How much time during the conference was spent in prayer, and did

you get any special “lights” from the Holy Spirit at this time?

We (everyone at the conference) spent probably one third of our time in prayer. Prayer was lifted to very high importance at this event. Everything began with prayer – lengthy, beautiful prayers -- and concluded the same way. Great importance was placed upon the starting of each session -- the talks and working segments -- with prayer. It just seemed understood and totally accepted that if we wanted the best fruit, we needed to ask Our Blessed Mother to lead us every step of the way.

This emphasis on prayer engendered in me even greater respect for the cardinals, bishops, archbishops and the other leaders who planned the conference. This was a terrific model for all of us as participants – that when we are working apostolically, we must first go to our Triune God and to Our Mother, never thinking that we as humans know the necessary and best directions to go in. Furthermore, we were about His work -- His Kingdom. I was so thankful for this model. The emphasis on prayer certainly touched my heart deeply.

It also reinforced the beautiful model we have in Regnum Christi – that of being contemplative and apostolic (the latter springing from the former, and with our focus on growth in our own holiness.) This is one of the many ways in which important aspects of Regnum Christi were confirmed at this special event.

I was especially moved by Cardinal Marc Ouellet’s extensive and beautiful prayer of love and gratitude to Our Lady of Guadalupe – delivered by him with deep emotion, and not lost upon the presentation to her by a bouquet of golden roses from the Pope immediately afterward.

Was seeing the tilma all you expected?

At first I was not “moved” like I had hoped or expected to be. (It was a little disappointing.) But it turned out that we had plenty of time to be in the Basilica facing Our Lady in the true tilma a lot of time – and my first reaction did not “tell it all.” Eventually, while in her presence, I started crying occasionally out of the blue, and not in response to something I thought or something said or prayed. Soon I found out that others were having the same experience – just breaking out in tears “randomly” in her presence.

Over those days, I felt extraordinary peace inside. I also felt that I could turn over all decisions (big and small) to her – that I could just abandon myself to her and she would lead me in every way, according to what she wanted. And, how she arranged the flowers for the bishop in Juan Diego's tilma, she kept arranging things for me. I was really stunned. When I needed something (e.g. water to drink), what I needed would appear or be made unusually available to me. This happened many times.

During the conference, you were divided into groups to discuss various topics of relevance to the Church in the Americas. Which group were you in, and what did you discuss? Who was in your group?

Karen attended the meeting on "Colleges and Universities." I attended the session on "Marriage and the Family."

My meeting was beautifully run by Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne of Lima, Peru and Bishop Olmsted of Phoenix. I especially got to know Bishop Olmsted well. What a terrific and kind and sensitive man! Ours was, by far, the largest group with about 30 participants, and they skillfully and respectfully got through suggestions of all of the participants in the allotted time – a major accomplishment. Everyone was treated so well and no one was rushed.

Among members in my group were Vicki Thorn, founder of Project Rachel, Leif Arvidson, executive director of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Dr. Jose Aste Tonsmann (whose advanced research on Our Lady's eyes in the tilma has amazed the world – see video of his work at:[http](http://www.sancta.org/videos.html)

[://www.sancta.org/videos.html](http://www.sancta.org/videos.html)

).

In our group, the many suggestions covered topics ranging from NFP to encouraging teens to focus ahead upon what careers/vocations/college majors would help them prepare to build God's Kingdom.

Later, there was a general meeting at which the major proposals of all

of the work groups were presented. Some key suggestions repetitively given were:

- Teaching the Story of Our Lady of Guadalupe and of all that surrounds it
- Helping People ENCOUNTER Christ, not just learn about Him
- Developing many more people to be missionaries
- Cross-cultural growth across religions, demographics, languages especially throughout the Americas, relating back to the history and example of Our Lady and Juan Diego
- The role of popular piety: spreading the love of Christ and evangelization via the laity, rather than from the top down
- Several documents (besides the one's I mentioned earlier) were stressed, including Pope Benedict's "Aparaceida" and Pope Francis' "Lumen Fidei."



Carl Anderson, Grand Knight, was a conference speaker.

Did you hear the speech from Grand Knight Carl Anderson? What do you remember about his talk?

From my notes, I remember Mr. Anderson saying that the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe provides an example of what the Laity can aspire to be. In fact, for those women who wish to have a more important role in the Catholic Church, there is no role greater than that given to and lived by the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ.

He pointed out that, as our Lady of Guadalupe, she presents and relates to a mixture of cultures. She interacts with people in a range of social strata as well as ages (from the Bishop to his guest, to his domestic help and their children, to Juan Diego to Juan Bernardino).

He stressed the importance of family in evangelization, emphasizing the family as the most natural means for evangelization. He also said that, as Catholics, we have to make ourselves available to more people and a greater variety of people who are yet waiting to hear the Gospel.

Mr. Anderson stressed how important kindness is and stated that the church grows by attraction, not by proselytizing. It should not just be the wealthy assisting the materially poor, and outreach should not be approached in a condescending or “paternalistic” way. Rather it should reflect Christ’s love. He added that we must to convey God’s love, reconciliation and forgiveness as demonstrated through Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Do you have any additional comments?

Yes. We in Regnum Christi have been taught and trained in many ways to help others “Encounter Christ.” That is what we need to be

doing, ranging from our regular “Encounters with Christ” to guiding others regarding Eucharistic Adoration, our missions, and our imitation of Christ and Our Blessed Mother as we interact with others. Moreover, I have found that others can encounter Christ in the reading aloud the Nican Mopohua in Appendix A of the Anderson and Chavez book. This is the first written account of the Our Lady of Guadalupe story, and is incredibly touching.

Finally, the Our Lady of Guadalupe image is that of a woman who is pregnant, which is a point significant to today’s Pro-life Movement and our need to understand the true dignity of the human person. The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe is all about the conversion of a culture that was widely and radically entrenched in human sacrifice for blood-thirsty gods to a “Civilization of Love” through Christ. I would encourage all RC members to intimately know her story and apply it wherever they feel so moved.



Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, the Archbishop of Mexico City, presents golden roses to Our Lady of Guadalupe.



For more information on the event, go to the following links to articles from the National Catholic Register, the Catholic News Agency, and

the YouTube video of the message delivered at the beginning of the event by Pope Francis.

<http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/conference-reaffirms-need-for-new-evangelization-in-americas>

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/conference-highlights-mary-as-example-of-evangelization/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmLI8GAU_Rw

Reflecting Christ to Others with Joy

Regnum Christi Live – January 23

By Karen Stein



Karen Stein of Cazenovia, New York, a member of Regnum Christi since 1991, was invited to Rome in December of 2012 to attend the International Congress on Ecclesia in America. She was deeply affected by the prayerful experience, including the Liturgy of the Hours Morning Prayer, a mass at St. Peter's, a personal meeting with the Pope Benedict XVI, and saying the Rosary in the Vatican Gardens. "After the Rosary, we were free to explore the Gardens on our own," she said. "Imagine!" In November, 2013, she had the opportunity to attend the follow-up pilgrimage and meeting, "Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelization on the American Continent," in Mexico City at the Our Lady of Guadalupe Basilica. Seeing people from all the countries in America "praying in their individual languages the Rosary while walking up the hill at Tepeyac, participating in Eucharistic Adoration and in the beautiful liturgies at the foot of Our Lady" and a personal teleconference with Pope Francis

left a lasting impression on her. Following is the first of a series on her impressions these experiences:

I believe that Christ is waiting for each one of us to find the path that leads us to Him.

Looking back, it is apparent there were incidents in my life that directed me one way versus another, some with Providence, and some without. It happens to all of us. (Most saints would confirm that they were not born that way rather they walked in our shoes and had their own stories of personal conversion before attaining heaven.)

I had no preconceived ideas or desires about attending the event in Rome. For me it was more like I was being sent out. It was a mysterious “Come and see” opportunity to deepen my understanding of how the Church works and to get to know the person of Christ more. I did have a curiosity of how to collaborate with the Church so that whatever I was called to do, it would be in sync with the mission of Evangelization. That is, it would complement her mission allowing the New Evangelization to happen faster and change our culture in these desperate times. Somehow God put me on this path, and my only hope was that He would tenderly make it clear to me the why, what, when and how.

I knew that those 4 days were not just for me, but rather everything that was given to me was to be shared so that others can come to a deeper understanding of the New Evangelization and develop a profound appreciation of where the heart of the Church is in light of this mission.

A month prior to the Conference on the New Evangelization, I was in Rome for a different meeting having been invited by my dear friend, Ashley. Up to the last week I was on the fence as to whether I was really meant to attend this meeting which was a very small group seminar on the laity’s role in the new springtime ushered in by Vatican II and organized by a group of which I was unfamiliar.

While discerning whether I should take my friend up on her invitation to this “Springtime of Faith” meeting, I clearly heard – “If you receive an invitation you should go.” Simple, but unexpected, it had to be one of those Holy Spirit moments. I booked my flight.

The first day I met a woman, Diana, also from New York, and discovered we both had been invited by Ashley who unfortunately was not able to attend. I can remember the entirety of our first conversation which revolved around our individual apostolates for women and Diana saying – almost blurting out - that she felt God had something exciting in store for our friendship. (Before leaving the Eternal City, she was proven right!)

Since fewer than 40 people were at this springtime meeting, we had the opportunity to get to know all of the participants. One man was keenly interested in our similar but different apostolates for women. He mentioned an upcoming conference on the document, *Ecclesia in America* and thought it important for women to be there. He forwarded our names to the Secretary for the Pontifical Commission for Latin America and they extended an invitation to both of us!

This International Congress on *Ecclesia in America* (to be held at the Vatican!) was sponsored by the Pontifical Commission and the Knights of Columbus and held over the Triduum of the feasts of Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe. It was less than a month away, and I had just returned from Rome and family was coming for Thanksgiving and Christmas! Needless to say, it was hard to imagine traveling for another week on such short notice. But Diana sent me an email trying to convince me to register, saying that her mother always said “if you receive an invitation, you should go.” (There was that Holy Spirit again!) Slowly, it began to sink in. But the idea remained incredible, a sentiment that has not subsided. How could I decline?

One week later we were at the Spanish steps with Pope Benedict XVI celebrating the Feast of the Immaculate Conception! This was not the first time I had seen Benedict up close. Each time it is an overwhelming and humbling experience. The next 4 days would be no different...

(more to come...)

The Family is Growing

U. S. A. | WHO WE ARE | NEWS

Cana Family Institute has new Episcopal Advisor and Logo

The “family” is growing for the Cana Family Institute (CFI).



CFI has a new logo.



The CFI Board of Directors, made up of laity and clergy, will now have an Episcopal Advisor, Bishop Ronald Gainer of Lexington, Kentucky.

Last year, [Familia](#) became a division of CFI and, according to Executive Director Jeannine Backstrom (an RC member living in Minneapolis, MN) the organization aims to expand its outreach to provide “programs for parents of adolescents, marriage dialogue training for priests, and marriage counseling for couples through local branches.” There are also plans to offer programs in Spanish for the Hispanic community.

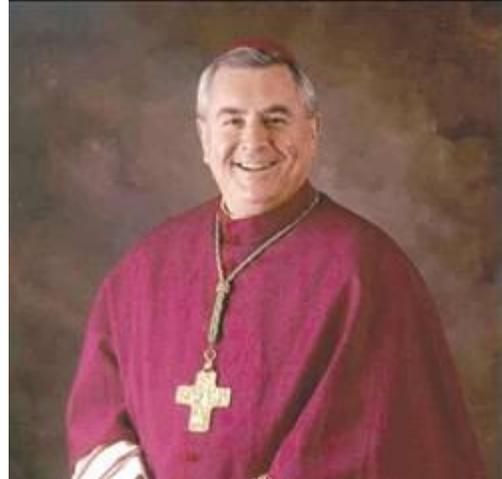
“Our goal is to find better and more fruitful ways to serve the Church by helping to address the daily challenges to authentic marriage and family life,” said Jeannine. “CFI focuses on personal accompaniment and the integral formation of husbands and wives, and assisting parish pastors through partnership in their marriage and family evangelization work.”

Bishop Gainer has been “a friend” of Familia, and now CFI, since he spoke at the 2009 Familia conference that took place in Lexington. The bishop’s new advisory position will help bring the Cana Family Institute towards its goal of establishing the group as an approved Catholic institution.

“It’s one piece of a non-linear

puzzle,” said Jeannine.

Another step toward legitimacy has been the creation of a visual identity for the Institute, now sporting a new logo. A contest last year challenged friends of Familia to submit ideas for the logo, and the board eventually selected the submission from Lee Orrison of Kansas City, an RC member and a graphic designer.



Bishop Ronald Gainer of
Lexington, Kentucky



“His concept came from the idea of family and the concept of the cross,” said Jeannine. “The image is intended to suggest the link between a husband and wife, symbolized by the two arms of the cross, linked together to form the cross, which is the family linked to Christ.”

The CFI board is currently involved in writing statutes for the Institute, with the help of a Catholic canon lawyer in the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, where Familia first began offering its programs. The recommendation for this canonist came from the diocesan Chancellor for Canonical Affairs, who has been advising the group on how to proceed thus far.

And another next step, or piece to place in the “puzzle,” will be to submit Cana Family Institute statutes to the competent ecclesial authority for recognition as a Catholic entity.

Finally, the group is working to strengthen the Familia leadership in 20 dioceses throughout the US including Atlanta, Georgia; Houston, Texas; Covington, Kentucky; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Lansing and Kalamzoo in Michigan. A leadership conference will be taking place from March 7 - 9, 2014, in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.

Anyone interested in discerning a leadership role at the Cana Family Institute, at the national or diocesan level,

is encouraged to attend the conference and can get more information at www.familiausa.net.or email Cana Family Institute at admin@canafamilyinstitute.com.



It's OK to Fall

Regnum Christi Live – January 24
By Jennifer Malneritch

I love watching the Summer Olympics. Ever since I discovered gymnastics, they have been magical to me.



It's been 10 years since I last set foot in a gym, and, I must admit, I still surprise myself when I realize that I am sitting tensely on the edge of my seat, jumping every time the gymnasts leap, flip, and hurdle.

Olympians make gymnastics look easy. It's not. Out of a hundred ways to perform a skill, there is only one way to get it right.

In other words, it's easy to fall.

I hate making mistakes. And I hate falling, especially from the balance beam. Since it's one of my favorite events, a fall from the beam adds an extra sting to my pride, not to mention fear of getting back up.

Four inches wide, and four feet high, the balance beam is one of the hardest events. On top of that, you have judges watching your every move; the score always seems too low.

So, what happens when you fall? Tough luck.

There is a tremendous amount of pressure in the whole ordeal if you look at it in the wrong way. Focusing on the score doesn't help you stay on the beam.

I used to treat God's love like the balance beam.

I thought I had to perform a perfect routine in order for Him to love me. Let me tell you, it is problematic when there is only one way to perform a skill right.

I fell into a cycle of performing, falling, beating myself up, getting mad at myself for beating myself up, and finally trying again. Not quite the right way to love God... It's not fun either.

"When you are standing and waiting for your turn, you have to be 100 percent confident that it is going to work. If you are even slightly nervous or worried that you might hurt yourself, that's when accidents usually happen," said Beth Tweddle, 2012 British Olympic medalist.

When you're so focused on your desire to perform a skill perfectly, you get nervous. When you're nervous, you fall. And it's never a good idea to beat yourself up. It makes you more nervous the next time you have to perform.

So what is the key to having confidence? Knowing the distance between the balance beam and the crash mat (a soft, thick mat used to prevent serious injury should a gymnast fall).

It takes a paradigm shift and a loss of poetry, but it leads to the right conclusion: God's love is the crash mat.

Let me say it again: God's love is NOT the balance beam. God's love IS the crash mat.

And get this; He doesn't let a judge's score determine whether He should love you or not!

Let's face it; I most probably will never perform a perfect balance beam routine. (It's a little hard in a skirt like consecrated women wear). But God is not asking me to be perfect.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux loved the image of a child flinging herself into her father's arms when she made a mistake. How could the father not forgive her because she had so much confidence in his love?

If I launch myself into my performance, confident that God will still love me if I fall, then when I land on the crash mat, I have nothing to be afraid of. In fact, the crash mat takes away my fear before I even start my routine. It is always there.

I still hate falling. It's still hard not to beat myself up. Isn't that life? But I can say that I have a lot more confidence going into my performance. I didn't choose to follow God because I am perfect, and I certainly didn't choose to follow a God who requires perfection.

I fell in love with a God who loves me as I am – the good and the bad.

It feels great to stand on the top of a podium with a medal around your neck. But I know from experience that I am much more proud of the routines that I went into with confidence and my best effort. In the end, medals just hang on the wall. But confidence teaches life lessons – besides, the judge's standards don't always coincide with God's.

For God, it's ok to fall.

Jim Fair
Communications Director
Legion of Christ
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