



# CONNECTIONS

*Celebrating Our Eucharistic Partnership in the Eymardian Family*

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## A Meeting of the Leadership of the Associates in the Province

In 2010, the leadership of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament reinstated the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament. In light of its experiences with committed laity over the previous 30 years, the Congregation sought to refocus how its religious wanted to share its Eucharistic mission with the laity. The document (called the *Rule of Life for Associates* in the United States) presented a renewed vision of the associated life of lay faithful with the Congregation, modeling its vision of the *Rule of Life* for the Congregation.

By 2015, there were nearly 200 Associates of the Blessed Sacrament in the United States. We in the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing (CEE) felt that the times called for us to set up local boards of lay leaders to assist the Local Religious Directors in animating and providing opportunities for ongoing formation, prayer, and fellowship. Today there are over 400 associates.

This past Saturday morning, September 26, Father John Christman, SSS, and I met via Zoom with leaders from these local boards. We engaged in a wonderful conversation largely focused on the resources we have been providing on the CEE website and the Province’s Facebook page link during the last six months. It has been a time of social distancing and no meeting in person for prayer, ongoing formation, and fellowship.

Here are some of the highlights:

1. The Daily Eucharistic Reflections remain the most valued resource we provide. People like the variety of perspectives from the mix of religious and lay writers. Different leaders talked about emailing the DERs to others and how important it was that parishioners can access them on their parish’s website.

2. Six months into the crisis created by Covid-19, people are busy with many things. The “lifeline” these resources were at the beginning has lessened in intensity. People get so many emails. Viewing the weekly website videos are not much of a priority for associates who are working or have children at home.

3. People really like the “Fireside Chat” videos with Brother Michael Perez, SSS, and Father John Christman, SSS.

4. Many of our older associates struggle with these new media technologies. It was suggested we send out concrete directions on how to access the resources.

5. We brainstormed how the local leaders could be creative in providing formation programs via Zoom.

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“The Eucharistic lifestyle of Christians is ecclesial and communal. Following the example of the first Christian community, our experience of communion is nourished by the word, by the ‘breaking of bread,’ by prayer, and by listening to the teaching of the apostles. By living ‘with one heart and soul,’ we witness to the presence of the risen Lord.”

*Rule of Life for Associates, 5*

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### A Meeting of the Leadership of the Associates in the Province (*Continued*)

6. One leader urged us to use every available means of communication to share our resources. One new means we need to explore is “Flocknotes,” a social medium specifically designed for parishes.

People really appreciated the opportunity to see other associate leaders, albeit on their computer screens, from around the country and hear what was going on in their local communities. The Initial and Ongoing Formation programs planned for the fall will largely be conducted via Zoom.

We at the CEE thank all of the leaders across the Province for all you are doing to serve the associates in the communities.

*Jim Brown*

### A Historical Note

#### The Story of the Aggregation (*Continued*)

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) brought tremendous changes to the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. It significantly affected how the community understood the Mass, adoration, and how these two important facets of their mission related to each other. It reshaped the Congregation’s sense of purpose and eventually the way lay people would associate with it. The religious of the Congregation were challenged to rethink the charism of the Founder, Saint Peter Julian Eymard. The renewal period that followed was a tumultuous time, both for the universal Church and the Congregation. There was a rather contentious struggle over the ideas of what it meant to reform and how to interpret the charism of the Founder for modern times.

Perhaps the most significant change was in regards to the Eucharist. For the Council placed the Eucharist at the center of the Church’s life and mission and also at the center of a Catholic’s spiritual life. The emphasis on perpetual adoration shifted. All devotions, including adoration, were to be seen as flowing from and going back to the Eucharist.

As we have seen, the primary mission of the Congregation up until the Council was to promote adoration. In rediscovering Father Peter Julian Eymard, it became clear that he called for both “contemplatives *and* apostles, adorers and firebrands, spreading the Eucharist everywhere to make our Lord known, loved, and adored everywhere” (Retreat of Rome, March 25, 1865). When the new *Rule of Life* was approved by Rome in 1984, the primary mission of the Congregation was the following:

“Our ideal is to live the mystery of the Eucharist fully and to make known its meaning, so that Christ’s reign may come and the glory of God be revealed to the world” (*Rule of Life*, 1). The Rule goes on to state that, “Following in the footsteps of Father Eymard, our mission is to respond to the hungers of the human family with the riches of God’s love manifested in the Eucharist. Drawing life from the bread given for the life of the world, we proclaim in the thanksgiving prayer [i.e., the Eucharistic Prayer] the Passover of Christ, and we welcome the Lord Jesus in his Eucharistic presence by a prolonged prayer of adoration and contemplation” (*Rule of Life*, 3). In other words, what we celebrate at the Eucharist we contemplate in adoration in order to respond to the needs of our world.

For nearly 20 years following the Vatican Council, the members of the Congregation argued and studied, prayed and discerned, seeking to understand the liturgical renewal that was happening. As a Eucharistic community, the task was clear: come to a consensus on what it meant for the mission of the Congregation to make the Eucharist the central focus to its life and mission as the “source and summit of the life of the Church.”

And then there was a shift in the mission of the Province of Saint Ann. At its chapter in 1990, the religious agreed to broaden its focus: to “make the riches of God’s love manifested in the Eucharist *in collaboration with the laity*.” Two years later, the Life in the Eucharist program was created.