

President's Report

Welcome to the 2024 UCESM General Assembly, hosted from April 15th to 20th at the historic Convent of the Minim Fathers in Vranov. We are honoured to have 66 attendees participating in this gathering, including 45 esteemed members and 7 distinguished guests whose insights will enrich our deliberations. Skilled interpreters will facilitate seamless communication in Italian, French, and English.

This year, our Assembly boasts representation from 23 countries, evidencing our broad European footprint despite the absence of Greece, Luxembourg, Romania, Russia, and the United Kingdom. Our composition reflects a balanced tapestry of 29 attendees from Eastern Europe and 37 from Western Europe, with 27 out of 38 Conferences present.

The agenda ahead is vibrant and multifaceted. Employing the SWOT analysis framework, going from strengths, looked at in the topic of identity, to weaknesses and threats - vulnerabilities, to opportunities – lay collaboration and synodal life, we will thoroughly explore our theme, “Religious Life: Identity and Future Facing the Challenges of Today.” This reflects our commitment to introspection, dialogue, prayer, and shared learning – core to the UCESM mission.

Religious identity may not be static but evolves in response to societal changes, technological advancements, and cultural shifts. Internal and external challenges within religious communities call for a renewal of religious life and adapting our traditions to contemporary contexts. Engaging more actively with laypeople could rejuvenate religious communities and bring fresh perspectives and energies. These partnerships can strengthen religious identity and make it more relatable and vibrant for broader segments of society.

We will delve into the issues that matter most to our collective mission through synodal and other collaborative approaches. By synodal method or spiritual conversation, I mean: first, active listening, where we try to understand each other. Second, speaking from the heart, which means sincerely and honestly sharing one's experiences, sentiments, and thoughts. Finally, seeing what emerged from the sharing and where the Holy Spirit moves.

In our gathering, we will see the fruits of past Assemblies take shape. We celebrate the Dicastery's approval of UCESM's canonical Statutes and will proceed to decisions regarding our civil status. Bank issues have been settled, and we will soon delve into our financial health and proposed fiscal strategies, as pre-communicated via email. A focused session on vocation promotion awaits, where we will evaluate this vital initiative's progress, potential, and future plans.

Safeguarding, a critical concern for us all, will be a prominent discussion topic. We will engage with the Pontifical Commission, seeking ways to enhance our safeguarding measures within UCESM and our respective Conferences. We will also discuss the possibility of setting up coordination groups within UCESM to promote a safe Church environment across Europe.

Throughout the General Assembly, we must think about a recurring question pivotal to our existence regarding the purpose of UCESM itself. While our Statutes outline our roles in promoting, coordinating, and representing our members, we must contemplate the essence of UCESM's identity and the future we envision. This involves considering our financial commitments, the utility of virtual assemblies, the establishment of dedicated teams like one for Safeguarding coordination, and the overall organisation of our gatherings. With an ageing membership and fewer new members, alongside financial constraints, we must think creatively and strategically about our collective future. Our direction is not mine to dictate but ours to forge together.

I wish all of us open communication and mutual respect, which could give us a shared vision in this collaboration as we enter the future.

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